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POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (PBIS) – AN INTRODUCTION

PBIS is a multi-tiered, evidence-based model that seeks to support and enhance both academic and behavioral outcomes for all students. PBIS was initially introduced during the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) to provide greater supports for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. In 1998 the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center for PBIS was created to provide resources and professional development tools for schools, districts, and states seeking to develop, implement and sustain PBIS for students with disabilities. However, the TA center shifted from its original focus to include a PBIS framework that supports all students, not just those with disabilities.

Overview

PBIS is not a packaged curriculum, but a framework rooted in a positive discipline philosophy that celebrates students for appropriate behaviors. Rather than waiting for students to misbehave and punishing them, PBIS uses a proactive approach to teach and model appropriate behaviors, and reinforce positive expectations for behavior through affirmations and rewards. This prevention approach has been adopted by many schools and school districts across the nation as a method to improve disciplinary outcomes and school climate. Since the year 2000, over 19,000 schools in 14 states have implemented PBIS school-wide.

PBIS utilizes a tiered support model where interventions are targeted to meet students' specific needs and exclusionary practices are explored as a last resort after corrective responses have been tried. The framework has three tiers of evidence-based strategies: universal interventions, targeted interventions, and intensive individualized interventions. Implementation of the framework includes providing supports at the universal level first and then moving on to the subsequent tiers as students with greater needs are identified.

PBIS Tiered Support Framework

- **Tier 1: Universal Interventions—All Students**
  - The appropriate and desired behaviors and core expectations for positive behavior are clearly outlined, modeled or labeled, and positively reinforced by teachers, administration and staff. Creating a positive school culture centered around the core values and implementing evidence-based prevention strategies are key focuses at the universal level.
  - Disciplinary responses for when students misbehave are on a continuum - the consequence depends on the severity of the student's behavior and other relevant factors, rather than a "one size fits all" approach to administering consequences. While each PBIS team decides what the consequences are, exclusionary responses are viewed as a last resort. Disciplinary responses at each level are consistently approached using evidence-based practices.

- **Tier 2: Targeted Group Interventions—5 to 10% of Students**
  - Tier 2 is designed to meet the needs of students who aren't responding to the universal interventions and who may require additional supports to help remedy any challenges/ issues, academic or social-emotional, which lie at the root of misconduct.
  - In many cases students who require Tier 2 support meet as a group and participate in a behavior education program. These programs remind students of the appropriate behaviors expected of all students and equip them with tools and strategies that will aid them in demonstrating positive

behavior. Some students may also receive a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and receive targeted interventions and behavioral supports.

- **Tier 3: Intensive Individualized Interventions—1 to 5% of Students**
  - Students who exhibit behaviors that are high-risk, disruptive, or greatly impede their learning are supported with Tier 3 interventions.
  - Students are assessed with the FBA and are issued a detailed, tailored support plan that involves multi-element, targeted intervention strategies designed to meet that particular student's needs. The support plan also outlines clear goals for the student, requires summary statements on the student's progress, and is explicitly focused on the individual student's demonstrated need.

PBIS Implementation

While an entire district may choose to adopt PBIS, it is the responsibility of each school to form a PBIS planning team to develop an action plan for carrying out the school's PBIS framework, which the team will share and discuss with the entire staff. A coalition of teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents make up the PBIS team, which determines what the behavioral expectations will be, how they will be taught, how they will be reinforced, and other positive disciplinary measures they plan to implement. Generally, a PBIS team determines three to five core expectations which serves as the guiding rules for student behavior. Examples of positive behaviors that align with the core expectations are provided to all students, including examples that demonstrate how the values can be executed both in and out of the classroom, such as in the cafeteria, in the restrooms, hallways, and on the playground.

A strong PBIS school team along with district-level support is critical to the effective implementation and sustainability of PBIS in the school. The team also oversees three other key elements that ensure PBIS is implemented with fidelity: data based decision-making, continuous monitoring of student behavior, and on-going professional development.

Importance of Fidelity

Research shows that in order to achieve the maximum benefits of the PBIS framework, it is essential that schools and districts implement PBIS with fidelity. Faithful implementation of PBIS includes some of the following characteristics:

- **Clear Expectations:** Expectations and rules are clearly developed, understood by students, and evident in the school's culture. Along with the students, faculty and staff model the positive behavioral expectations and rules set for the school.
- **Commitment:** The faculty and staff, especially the PBIS team, commit to the PBIS model, set goals, and meet regularly to review the progress of students and outcomes and make necessary adjustments. Team-based problem-solving is essential to implementation fidelity.
- **Consistency:** Positive reinforcements for appropriate behaviors and consequences for inappropriate behaviors are issued consistently on a school-wide basis. Consistent and reliable rewards and consequences ensure that students are getting a clear message about what types of behaviors are or are not appropriate.
- **Data:** Data are collected and evaluated to support administrators in monitoring student progress and making decisions that refine practice, support implementation, and gauge the efficacy of PBIS. Data is key for the PBIS team to determine students' needs, align specific interventions with those needs, and evaluate the impact of the interventions.

PBIS Successes

- **Denver Public Schools, Denver, CO**
  - As of 2011, Denver Public Schools has implemented PBIS in approximately 98 schools throughout their district. In the 2012-2013 school year, 63 percent of all students in the system were enrolled in a PBIS school. Since the implementation of PBIS, some schools have seen a reduction in office discipline referrals (ODRs) as great as 60 percent, with an average reduction in ODRs of 39 percent. In an effort to decrease the disproportionality in school discipline, Denver also adopted new non-discrimination policies and added cultural-sensitivity training as part of professional development.
- **Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), Los Angeles, CA**
  - LAUSD decided to implement PBIS district-wide in the spring of 2007 to maximize student achievement while improving and fostering a safe school environment for all students. After two years of district-wide PBIS, there was a 20 percent decrease in suspensions. After three years of PBIS, K-12 schools in Local District 7 saw a 56.7 percent drop in school expulsions.
- **Florida PBIS**
  - As of January 2012, 88 percent of the 1,340 schools in Florida had either implemented PBIS or were in the process of implementing PBIS. On average, after one year of PBIS implementation, ODRs dropped 15.48 percent, in-school-suspensions dropped 18.12 percent, and out-of-school suspensions dropped 8.19 percent.

For District and State Information on PBIS, visit:

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina
- San Jose Unified School District, California
- Colorado Department of Education, PBIS Initiative
- Ohio Department of Education, PBIS Network
- Georgia Department of Education, PBIS
- Wisconsin PBIS Network
- Vermont PBIS Network
- Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project
- Missouri School-wide Positive Behavior Support

For more information, visit:

- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, PBIS Website
- Association for Positive Behavior Support, Resources for Schools and Districts

Sources:

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