Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports

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Scott Fluke & Reece L. Peterson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Tier 1, 2 or 3 Intervention

Students who are unable to behave appropriately and follow school rules are unable to learn. Worse, these students may distract their peers and their teachers, decreasing the value of the classroom as a whole. Improving student behavior has been shown to improve academic performance (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). Schools should therefore make teaching appropriate behaviors a priority.

Schools have typically relied on traditional discipline practices such as detention, suspension, and expulsion to teach students how to behave. Unfortunately, research has consistently demonstrated that these techniques are not effective because they do not aim to replace the punished behavior with appropriate behavior, they do not teach new more appropriate behaviors, they do not reduce future incidences of the punished behavior, and as a result of these techniques, students miss valuable instruction time (Cameron, 2006). As an alternative to these techniques, researchers have developed and begun implementing School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS*; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

What are Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports?

PBIS is a school-wide framework for preventing, reducing, and replacing problem behaviors. It has been implemented in thousands of schools across the nation. The purpose of PBIS is to explicitly teach positive, appropriate behaviors while creating an environment in which these behaviors are more attractive than are other negative, inappropriate behaviors. Schools that successfully implement PBIS have the following key elements in place:

- A school-wide focus on the importance of a student's environment and the role it plays in encouraging or discouraging behavior; efforts to continuously strengthen the school climate.
- A team-oriented approach to planning and implementation of interventions and procedures.
- A clear set of behavioral expectations and goals.
- The constant use of data collection and data analysis to facilitate team and staff decision making
- A tiered approach to interventions (see "Three tiers of intervention" below).
- Direct, explicit teaching of appropriate student behavior in the environments where that behavior is expected.
- A consistent effort to reinforce positive student behavior.

* While School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is often identified with the acronym SWPBIS, we have chosen to use the shorter PBIS. In addition early work on this topic may have used the PBS acronym for Positive Behavior Supports, but this abbreviation was confused with other programs, and has generally been discontinued. PBIS, PBIS and PBS all identify the same strategy.

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What are some of the underlying principles of PBIS?

Many of the techniques used in PBIS are based on behavioral research, which boasts some of the strongest evidence and outcomes across the social sciences. This research has collectively shown that much of human behavior can be explained and modified by reinforcement and punishment. A behavior is reinforced when it is followed by something good (e.g., praise) or by taking away something bad (e.g., getting out of a chore). Conversely, a behavior is "punished" when it is followed by something bad (e.g., a truly undesirable task) or by the removal of something good (e.g., loss of a privilege). Behaviors that are reinforced tend to be repeated more frequently in the future, while behaviors that are punished in this way tend to be repeated less frequently. This is why traditional discipline strategies often fail; they attempt to punish students with ineffective consequences (for example removing a student from school may be a desirable or reinforcing consequence for some students, and does not teach or reinforce more appropriate behaviors). Systems based on reinforcement lead to more powerful behavior change than do systems based exclu-

sively on punishment. Moreover, systems based on punishment may have other side effects such as students attempting to avoid or escape punishment (e.g., skipping school or cutting a class), as well as creating a negative attitude about school and a stressful learning environment.

Three Tiers of Intervention

PBIS is based on a mental health prevention model of three "tiers" of intervention. These tiers serve as the framework through which decisions about interventions are made. Most often these three tiers are graphically represented in a triangle diagram (See example below.) However, these tiers may also be represented as concentric circles . (See examples on the next page.) The tiers may help prioritize the type and intensity of interventions for behavior that students receive.
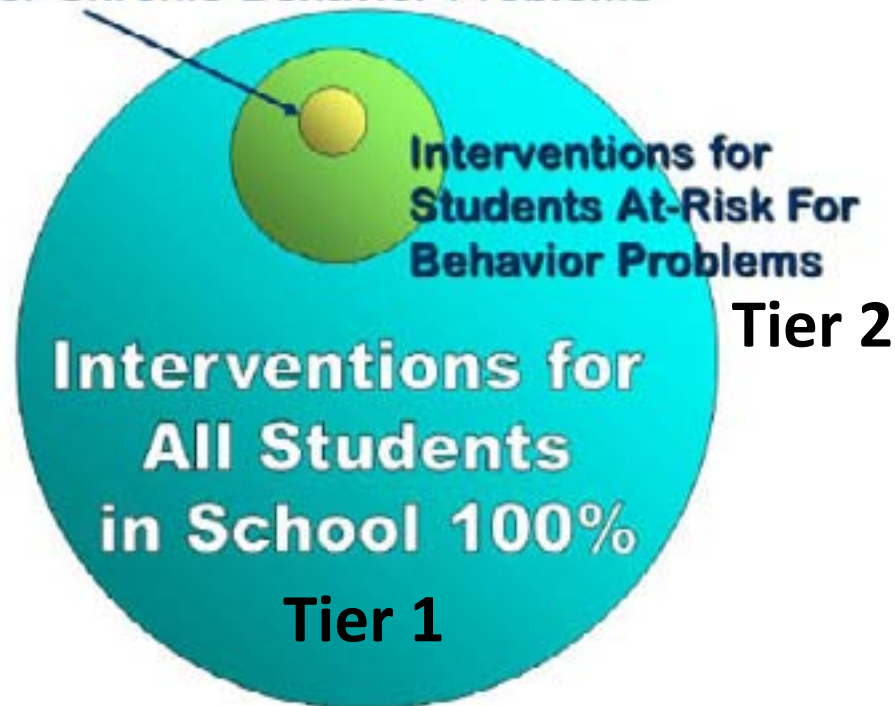
Tier 1 Intervention

All students receive Tier 1 interventions, which are often preventative in nature and aimed at creating a positive and reinforcing learning environment. All students benefit from Tier 1 interventions, and it is often estimated
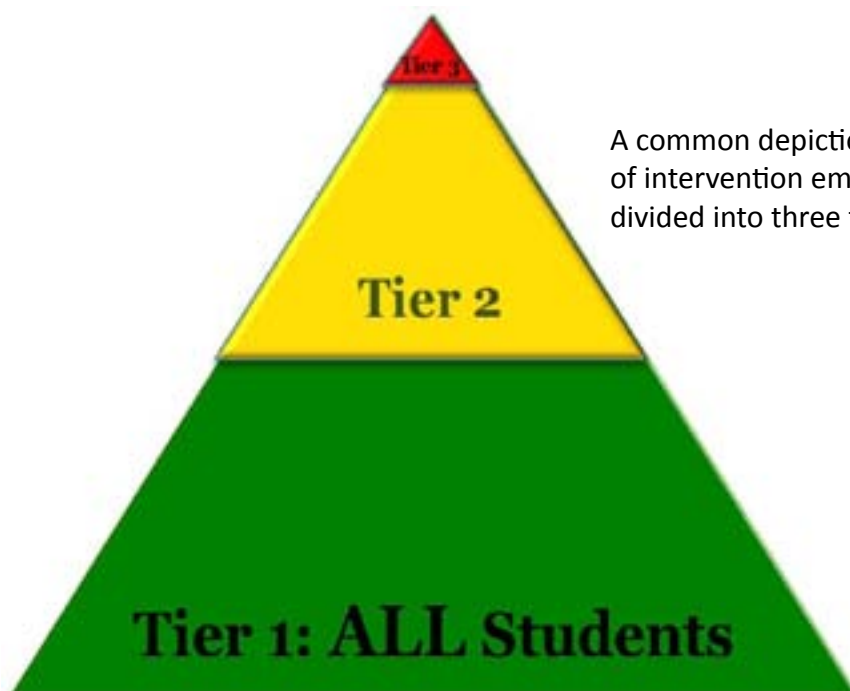
A common depiction of the PBIS tiers of intervention employing a triangle divided into three tiers.

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Interventions and Planning for Students with
Serious or Chronic Behavior Problems

Tier 3

Interventions for
Students At-Risk For
Behavior Problems

Tier 2

Interventions for
All Students
in School 100%

Tier 1

A concentric circle depiction of tiersof intervention as described in the
Safe and Responsive Schools Framework (Peterson, Miller & Skiba, 2004)

that approximately 80% of students will not need additional interventions beyond those at Tier 1. These interventions can include but are not limited to:

- Establishment of a few simple, positive school expectations for behavior (e.g., "Be safe, be respectful, be responsible"). These expectations are explicitly taught to all students and are clearly posted in all classrooms, and should be understood by students.
- Examples of the behaviors that meet these behavioral expectations are explicitly taught for various school environments (e.g., in the classroom, cafeteria, playground, etc.).
- Systematic, consistent reinforcement, in a variety of forms, but often with only staff praise, for all students when they follow behavioral expectations. Although this

reinforcement should be consistent, and all students should receive this reinforcement over a period of time, students are not to receive it every single time they comply with the expectations.
- Establishment of a positive school climate, wherein students respect and trust the adults in the school (see the Staff-Student Relationships Strategy Brief)
- Consistent, fair, and evidence-based punishments for when behavioral expectations are not met (e.g., time-out for younger students, loss of a privilege for older students, etc.).
- School-wide collection and analysis of data about behavior, which is used to modify school procedures or make other changes. For example, if a large percentage of office referrals are found to be from the cafeteria, increasing adult supervision there may reduce future referrals.

Tier 2 Intervention

Even with Tier 1 interventions in place, some students will show signs of difficulty in complying with the behavioral expectations. Signs may include behavior management problems in class, tardiness, office referrals, absences, etc. These students who are at risk of developing more serious behavior problems are then identified to receive Tier 2 interventions and supports. At Tier 2, interventions are more intensive (i.e., they are stronger and more likely to elicit change) but also may require more resources. However, they are focused only on those students for whom data suggests are having difficulty. In a total school population it is estimated that approximately 15% of students might develop some form of behavioral difficulty and require Tier 2 supports in addition to all Tier 1 supports. Tier 2 interventions for students at risk might include:

- Additional instruction about and examples of appropriate behavior; social skills instruction targeted on their behavior needs.
- Regular behavior monitoring and extra reinforcement for appropriate behavior. For example having the student check-in/check-out with a teacher or administrator to more closely monitor progress and provide feed-

back and opportunity for reinforcement.
- Small group intervention with a counselor for a specific problem (e.g., drug abuse, social skills training).
- Assignment of an adult mentor.
- Extra academic tutoring and homework assistance, if those are a problem.
- Special efforts to "catch these students behaving well" and to reinforce them when that happens.

Tier 3 Intervention

When students continue to have behavioral difficulties in spite of Tier 2 interventions, they may be in need of even more intensive interventions that are specifically focused on their needs. These are identified as Tier 3 supports. These supports are the most intensive and resource dependent, and thus are reserved for the approximately 5% or less of students who do not respond to Tier 1 & 2 interventions. Again, students receiving Tier 3 supports must also receive all appropriate Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports. Some examples of Tier 3 interventions include:

- Functional behavior assessment (FBA) to determine the events preceding and following problem behavior, which is then used to create an individualized behavior plan.
- Individual counseling for a specific problem (e.g., bullying).
- Special class or residential treatment where more structure and supervision can be provided.
- Wraparound coordination of family and community agencies along with the school.
- Therapy from mental health professionals.
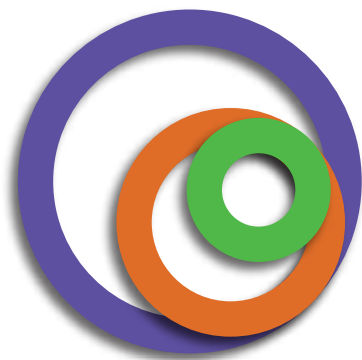
Decision Making in PBIS

Consistent comprehensive data collection about student behavior facilitates decisions to move students from tier to tier. School based teams can establish specific guidelines outlining when students are not responding well to their current tier, and conversely, when they are responding strongly enough to a Tier 2 or 3 in-

Tier 1, 2 or 3 Intervention

terventions to no longer require those supports. Just as physicians use specific information to determine their patients' treatment, schools must gather and use data to determine the behavioral needs of their students.

Framework for Other Interventions

Importantly a wide variety of other strategies and programs may be adapted to fit within the framework of PBIS, so long as the core elements of PBIS are maintained. These strategies may provide school based teams with additional interventions for one or more of the three tiers. These can supplement the core elements of PBIS by identifying which Tiers of intervention they fit, or can be adapted based on whether the strategy applies to all students, or just those who are at risk or who have more chronic behavior problems, and permit options for more individualized tailoring of interventions to student needs.

What do we know about PBIS?

PBIS is very well researched, with positive outcome data from multiple research groups across the country. A literature search for PBIS reveals well over 300 peer reviewed research articles published in the past 10 years alone. Most of these studies actually provide outcome data on the implementation of PBIS, and the outcomes have been almost universally positive when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. This gives PBIS the largest research base of any school-wide behavior program.

Results from large scale studies consistently support the implementation of PBIS at the school, district, or even state level. Common findings include reductions in problem behaviors, reductions in suspension rates, increases in prosocial behaviors, and increased social skills (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012). For example, a study of 37 elementary schools

implementing PBIS in Maryland found that, following implementation of the program, a lower percentage of students received office referrals, a lower overall office referral rate, and a lower suspension rate, among other benefits (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). Results from a large-scale study in Iowa are similar: implementation of PBIS led to as much as a 42% decrease in daily office referrals (Mass-Galloway, Panyan, Smith, & Wessendorf, 2008). One participating school estimated that it saved almost 240 hours of instructional time and 120 hours of administrative time in one year from the reduced referral rate alone.

Aside from the behavioral benefits, implementation of PBIS has been linked to better performance in the classroom. For example, the program can improve math and reading achievement, and better adherence to PBIS procedures magnified these effects (Lassen, et.al., 2006). This improved academic achievement may be particularly pronounced for students with disabilities (Chitiyo , Makweche-Chitiyo, Park, Ametepee, & Chitiyo, 2011). It should be noted that an initiative parallel to that for behavior has been implemented for academic performance, and is widely known as Response to Intervention (RTI).

While the majority of research focuses on elementary school settings, PBIS has demonstrated successes in high school settings, as well as urban settings (Bohanon et al., 2006). PBIS has also been linked to increased organizational health (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009), improved recess behaviors (Franzen & Kamps, 2008), decreased bullying (Ross & Horner, 2009), among other ancillary benefits. Thus, researchers encourage schools to implement PBIS because it leads to an overall decrease in problem behavior, increase in productive behavior, an increase in academic achievement, and an overall healthier, more positive school environment.

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Conclusion

Given the extremely strong research base for PBIS, and given the usefulness of the tiered model of making intervention decisions, and given its widespread use (in over 18,000 schools according to its website), PBIS has become the pre-eminent strategy for improving student behavior in school settings. Its framework establishes a clear emphasis on prevention of behavior problems, but also permits data based decision making about the intensity of interventions needed when problems to occur. It has become the basic tool to address behavior in school settings.

Essential PBIS Components
- Administrative leadership
- Team-based implementation
- Defined behavioral expectations
- Teaching of behavioral expectations
- Acknowledging and rewarding appropriate behavior
- Monitor and correct behavioral errors
- Use data/information for decision-making

Resources

The primary website resource on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is: www.pbis.org.

This comprehensive website is a great tool for researchers and practitioners that aim to implement school-wide behavior and disciplinary strategies. The site includes information violence and bullying prevention, family involvement, and how these and other strategies can be fit within the PBIS three tiered models of behavior support. The website also provides data tools, forms, legal information and a wide array of other information regarding PBIS.

For those who are not familiar with PBIS the larger website has a section for "beginners" at: http://www.pbis.org/school/swpbis_for_beginners/default.aspx

In addition numerous state PBIS initiatives have state sponsored websites with materials related to PBIS and implementation.

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