

# **Lessons Learned on Implementation of PBIS in High Schools**

Current Trends and Future Directions

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## Recommended Reference

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In 2009 the Technical Assistance Center in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support hosted a high school forum to bring together a small number of high schools that were successful implementers. The result of this forum was the development of a monograph *School-Wide PBIS Implementation in High Schools: Current Practice and Future Directions* [<http://bit.ly/monograph2009>]. This monograph contained five chapters on: (1) Administrative Roles and Functions in PBIS High Schools, (2) Establishing and Maintaining Staff Participation in PBIS High Schools, (3) Connecting PBIS to Academic Curriculum in High Schools, (4) Data-Based Decision Making in High Schools, and (5) Secondary and Tertiary Tier Supports in High School.

Over the past decade, high schools have faced challenges and new initiatives. This has resulted in the development of approaches to address these and meet the unique needs of high schools and their students. Also because of the increase in the number of high schools implementing PBIS, there is now a greater understanding of the unique characteristics of high schools that impact effective implementation of PBIS. With this in mind, we reviewed the content in the chapters in the 2009 monograph and found the content to still be accurate and relevant. At the same time through discussions and

work with high schools that are implementing PBIS we have identified some emerging topics that Schoolwide Leadership Teams are addressing in their implementation. Thus, this monograph *Lessons Learned on Implementation of PBIS in High Schools: Current Trends and Future Directions* was designed to provide information and strategies for these emerging issues that can be used as needed by administrators, coaches and Leadership Teams to address their unique needs. A brief summary of each chapter is below.

**Chapter 2. Consider Context and Foundational Systems When Implementing PBIS in High Schools.** Despite this promising national growth of SWPBIS implementation in high schools, when working with district coaches or teams, we often continue to hear that “It is different to implement in our high schools,” or “Our high schools say they need their own trainings.” We attribute this to the need to attend to the high school context when implementing and the impact of this on the implementation. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the key contextual variables of high schools and the impact of these on the implementation process. Especially attention is drawn to the systems that need to be established to ensure efficiency and sustainability.

**Chapter 3. Effective District Supports for High School Implementation of PBIS.** Strong

district support and guidance when implementing PBIS can enhance the outcomes and sustainability. This can be through three types of support: providing leadership and management, providing professional development, and promoting effective environments. The purpose of this chapter is to describe role of district in the implementation through these three areas and especially how it applies to high schools.

**Chapter 4. *Coaching PBIS in High Schools: Skills, Strategies, and Lessons Learned.*** Effective coaching is a critical component in the development of a sustainable PBIS initiative. Although coaching has common features across all settings, effectively coaching high schools warrants a discussion that focuses on unique nuances and contextual considerations. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the strategies and skills needed by coaches to successfully support high school implementation, the merits of administrative support and lessons learned from the field.

**Chapter 5. *Stronger Together: Delivering College and Career Readiness Skills to all through a School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Framework.*** High Schools are faced with the challenge to deliver College and Career Ready skills is determining and balancing the learning opportunities all high school students need to achieve, while layering additional learning opportunities for students that require more individualized supports. The purpose of this chapter is to provide suggestions for modifying current PBIS implementation efforts to explicitly teach, practice, and reinforce the College and Career Ready skill set.

**Chapter 6. *Investing in Freshmen: Providing Preventive Support to 9th Graders.*** Ninth grade year has been identified as one of the most important years in high school Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports offers schools a way to address these 9th grade challenges. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize both the rationale for elevating PBIS support for high school freshmen, and the elements of freshmen support that are emerging as most efficient and effective.

**Chapter 7. *Including Student Voice in PBIS Implementation.*** Schools across the nation implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are finding success with getting student voice included in implementation of PBIS and as a result seeing greater student buy-in. The strategies and processes used may vary to fit within the high school context, but schools are seeing the value of student involvement. The purpose of this chapter is to share some of the strategies being used by schools and also to share how to increase the level of participation and student voice.

**Chapter 8. *Providing a Safe & Supportive High School Environment for Every Student.*** High schools currently serve a more and more diverse set of students which often challenges the development of a safe and positive climate. One of their challenges will be to include and support marginalized youth in their buildings. This chapter will provide examples and guidance on ways high schools may enhance implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to intentionally include and support students who may be at risk of marginalization.

### Summary

By July 2017, PBIS was being implemented in more than 3,367 high schools in all 50 states—a growth from about 1,000 in 2010 (personal communication PBIS Technical Assistance Center, July 15, 2018). Though these high schools are in various stages of implementation each is at least in process of implementing Tier I supports. As the number of high schools continue to implement, it will be important to continue to expand the availability of practical application for coaches, teachers and administrators. Some of the key findings or themes from these chapters for stakeholders were:

- Practitioners should recognize the differences associated with HS implementation
- Students should become actively involved both in their schools and in their communities in an effort to build a positive and safe school climate
- Administrators should be actively engaged and visibly supportive of the implemen-

tation of PBIS as it is a framework that can support multiple initiatives and yield greater outcomes for students with more effective use of adult time.

- Policy decision makers should realize the potential impact PBIS can have on school safety and on student outcomes; behaviorally, socially, and academically. They need to understand that implementation is maximized when resources are dedicated to it.
- Researchers should engage in experimental research studies to continue to evaluate the impact PBIS has on social emotional development, academic success, school safety, respect for diversity, and transitions (between grades and post-secondary).

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# Consider Context and Foundational Systems When Implementing PBIS in High Schools

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Over the past five years, the number of high schools implementing PBIS has increased notably. In 2012-2013 a total of 2,595 high schools reported fidelity scores to the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Support, indicating at least some level of implementation of PBIS. By 2016-2017 that number had risen to 3,367. Every state is represented in these data, and 17 states (33%) showed implementation occurring in at least 20% of their high schools.

Despite this promising national growth of PBIS implementation in high schools, when working with district coaches or teams, we often continue to hear that “It is different to implement in our high schools,” or “Our high schools say they need their own trainings.” Why is this? From the work of Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005), we know that understanding and attending to both the key features of an initiative (e.g., PBIS: leadership team, data use in decision making, consequence systems) and to the context in which it is being

implemented (e.g., people, environment, culture, resources) are equally critical to the success of that initiative. A number of authors who have written about the implementation of PBIS in high schools have discussed the influence of the high school context on implementation (Bohanon, Fenning, Borgmeier, Flannery, & Malloy, 2009; Flannery & Kato, 2017; Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson 2009; Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery, 2015).

There are several contextual variables to keep in mind as you implement in high schools. We will discuss three here, as these are the variables we believe to have the greatest impact on PBIS implementation in high schools: size, organizational culture, and the age of students (see Figure 1). These variables need to be carefully considered as you implement systems, data, and practices that make up PBIS. The first variable is *size*. High schools are large, complex organizations. Having buildings that are typically larger than those at elementary and middle levels also presents unique challenges. In these larger build-

ings, teachers and staff only see and interact with a small portion of their colleagues on a day to day basis, driving the need for different infrastructures, such as academic departments. One use of academic departments is to have teachers of like content and approaches to teaching work together. Each department can form its own culture and approach to teaching and behavior. This has many benefits, but can also result in a strong “siloe” structure within the high school. These differences need to be bridged when gaining initial buy-in, communicating later about status or gaining input on next steps.

A central aim of PBIS is to establish building-wide consistency and predictability. High schools often have more staff and students than in the lower grades. This means communicating with more people to keep them on the same page. It is simply more difficult to create and maintain consistency and predictability with a larger staff and student body. Another factor related to size that seems to impact high schools more than elementary or middle schools is the larger administrative teams that are often in place in high schools. These larger administrative teams are usually made up of the principal and vice principal(s), as well as Deans of Students, Department heads, and other administrative leadership roles. With multiple people sharing the responsibility for different aspects of the school’s leadership, it is critical that each person is informed and clear about the direction, priorities, and messaging around PBIS implementation, and about their individual role in it. If not well planned for, size-related variables such as these can impair

communication, data collection and implementation of various practices.

A second high school contextual variable to consider is the school’s **organizational culture**. Organizational culture is made up of the values, expectations, attitudes and beliefs that are held by the people within an organization. In high schools, the organizational culture strongly influences how the students and the adults in each school building behave, what is prioritized, how business is conducted, and the extent of freedom in decision making. There are some values or attitudes that are common to most high schools. One is the shift away from a social-emotional focus to one that is solely academic. Certainly all grade levels are focused on academics, but high school teachers often approach their work as a content expert (e.g., science, English), and many do not feel they have a responsibility to teach non-academic content that supports learning such as social skills or study strategies. Another important factor of the high school organizational culture is the increased use of an “exclusionary approach”. Because high schools often have multiple placement options (e.g., different levels of math; alternative programs or schools) there is commonly a perception that there is always someplace else for the student if they are not being successful in their current setting, whether that be in a different class or in a different program or school.

The third contextual variable that impacts high school PBIS implementation is the **age of the students**. As students get older, they want to have greater input into decisions that impact them and are strongly influenced by their peers.

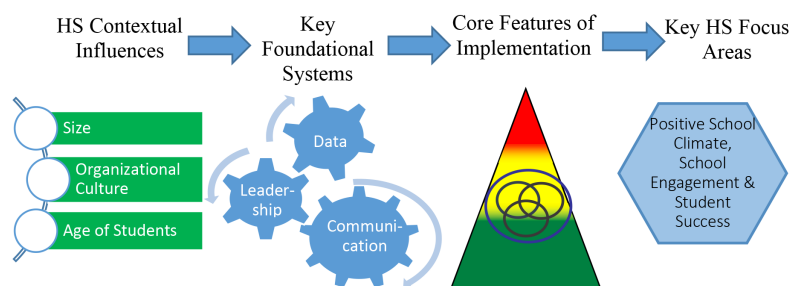
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This suggests that PBIS Leadership Teams should provide a variety of ways for increased involvement by students in the establishment of the practices and systems in their school. Students have a wealth of ideas and utilizing them in the planning and implementation process will help ensure that the practices are relevant and meaningful to the broader student audience, and that systems account for and include this key group of stakeholders.

The consideration of the age of students goes beyond their ability to provide input. It also can result in a misperception by staff of student's knowledge and understanding of rules and expectations, and of their need for ongoing support. For example, as noted above, faculty can often have the expectation that all students who arrive at high school should know and be able to perform the appropriate behaviors. PBIS Leadership Teams will need to work with the faculty and staff to understand the continuous need for teaching expectations, ensuring consistent consequences and acknowledging appropriate student behavior.

What we have found as we work with high schools implementing PBIS is that these three contextual variables impact the foundational systems required to support implementation. Systems are the mechanisms that must be in place to support the faculty and staff in carrying out effective practices and data-based decision making. When you have a complex organization like a high school, it becomes even more important that these systems be strong. There are three foundational systems that seem to be most impacted by the school context: leadership, communication and data systems (see Figure 1). The Leadership System is made up of the Schoolwide PBIS Leadership Team, the Administrative Team and other leadership in the building such as department heads or Deans of Students. As noted above, because high schools have these larger leadership structures, it becomes even more important to have a clear system among the different entities to be sure they are working well together to accomplish the school's overall goals. The Communication System consists of plans for what needs to be

communicated, and for how and when communication will be carried out among the various constituency groups, namely staff, students, central district administration, families, school board and community members. Teams need to communicate their key actions or next steps; outcomes or results; rationale for specific actions; and what it means for the relevant stakeholder group(s). This requires utilizing



**Figure 1:** High School Implementation of PBIS

various modes and frequency of communication, depending on the needs of each specific communication effort. It is critical that communication be two-way with all constituency groups, including students. Third, Data Systems include the mechanisms by which key data are collected, summarized, used in decision making and planning, and shared. Having more data overall in high schools requires that there be clear data systems operated by trained staff who are fluent in interacting with the school's various databases and summarizing data in a meaningful format. Let's take a look at these systems and how they are impacted by the three contextual variables common in high schools.

First let's look at the contextual impact on the **PBIS leadership system in the high school**. This will happen at two levels – one is the Leadership Team itself and the other is the role of the administrators. There are many teachers in high schools, making it difficult for six to eight people on a Leadership Team to represent all views. It is possible to increase the size of the team, but that greatly impacts the ability to get work done (e.g., scheduling, holding efficient meetings, making effective decisions). To stay efficient, we recommend that high schools keep the PBIS Leadership Team at six to eight members and instead think of new strategies to obtain input and participation of a broad set of perspectives. Some ideas to consider that may help address the contextual impacts are:

- Recruit additional faculty and staff to engage through a sub-committee structure that works directly with the Leadership Team (e.g., communication, acknowl-

edgements, student involvement). Each one of these committees should include someone from the Leadership team to be sure communication is fluent between the Leadership Team and the committee.

- Develop a standing list of faculty and staff willing to assist and then form ad hoc committees as needed. Again, these ad hoc committees should include a member from the Leadership Team to ensure adequate communication and connection to the school-wide action plan.
- Invite specific staff to participate in a regularly scheduled leadership team meeting when a specific topic or perspective would benefit from the “visiting” staff participant.
- Establish a “reach out” practice. Examine how your school is structured – English, department, math department, career and counseling, security, etc. There will be representatives from some of these departments on the Leadership Team, but not all. If there are multiple members from the same department on the Leadership Team you might consider substituting with a member from an unrepresented department. Then look at what faculty/staff groups are not represented on the team and each member assign themselves to outreach – actively update and gain input from these faculty and staff. In other words, ask your team “Can we say that every adult in our building is connected with one member of the PBIS team?”
- Look into the roles of staff and assign tasks to the staff that fit into their everyday responsibilities. For example, if you have a graphics design class, this class could

design the expectations and rules posters and graphics. If there is a technology class responsible for the announcements, they can make PBIS one of the standard items on the announcements. This allows them to support the Leadership Team without being on the team.

- Turnover in schools can be an issue with the Leadership Team. If the school has a history of turnover, consider having a coach or team leader in training. This allows the coach or team leader in training to step up to the plate in the coach or team leaders absence or if the team leader or coach leaves the school. In short, always have a backup plan.

A second aspect of the leadership system in high schools is the **complex, layered administrative structure**. High school leadership often includes the principal, a number of vice or assistant principals, Deans of Students, and department heads or divisional leaders. These leaders often operate largely independently of one another. Therefore, having a single representative administrator on the team as in the lower grades may not be effective in a high school unless other steps are taken to ensure the entire leadership team is kept up to date on activities and decisions around PBIS implementation. PBIS requires schoolwide agreement on a number of systems and practices, and a clear system needs to be developed to assist in communication and decision making related to the common systems and practices. Some strategies used by high schools to ensure adequate administrative involvement include:

- Clarify specifically how the principal will support implementation (announcements, sharing data, distributing acknowledgements to staff). Although the principal may not be on the Leadership Team, it is important that the principal has the role and responsibility to provide a united message about the importance and progress of the initiative.
- Develop a communication plan between the administrative team and the Leadership Team. For example, how often will the administrative team be updated, what decisions can be made by the Leadership Team (including the administrative representative) and what needs to be reviewed by administrative team? Consider whether you may need to initiate a process that is similar for the department head meeting, deans meetings or other leadership groups in the building where the Leadership Team member(s) can communicate and obtain support and input on implementation.
- Often the administrative representative can be called away from meetings, so it is important to establish protocols to ensure the administrator continues to participate and support team efforts, such as agreeing that the administrator will review and comment on minutes within 48 hours of the meeting. Consider highlighting the action items that require administrator action to make the process more efficient for them. A similar protocol could be adopted for any member of the leadership team who is not present at a team meeting and.

Another way in which the leadership system is impacted by contextual factors is that the

age of high school students requires broadening the concept of school leadership to include the **active participation of students** in the planning and implementation of practices. As noted above, students want to be involved in decision making and they often have a better idea than faculty and staff about what is happening around the school and why it is happening. Many Leadership Teams have learned through student input about issues that faculty and staff were not aware of, especially in common areas where supervision can be limited. Some teams have added students to their leadership team, but have found this to be a challenge. It is often difficult to (a) get student and staff schedules to match for meetings, (b) identify a couple of students who can represent the voice of the diverse students who are in the high school, and (c) arrange meeting agendas without staff and teachers being constrained about confidential issues with students present. Recommended strategies include (also see Chapter 7 in this monograph that is focused on student involvement):

- Establish a standing committee of students to work with the Leadership Team in developing and delivering some of the PBIS components (e.g., development of lessons or videos, delivery of lessons related to expectations, orientations for new students, delivery of acknowledgement to students and staff).
- Establish ad hoc committees that include students and staff or only students. These are short term committees to address specific issues (e.g., develop plan to reduce harassment in the locker bay) or fill a specific need (e.g., develop videos for fall ori-

entation and training, develop surveys or gather specific input from peers).

- When establishing these committees sometimes schools have outreached to a relevant existing student committee or club. For example, the Media Club for video development or the Hospitality and Tourism Club to assist in planning the opening school event.
- To try and get a representative sample of students, some schools have asked each of the student clubs to send a representative to an ad hoc committee.

The second broad system that is consistently impacted by high school contextual variables is the **communication system**. Communication is critical to any initiative; to get it started and to keep it going. Due to the size of building, size of staff, complex schedules, and heavy reliance on departmental structures, faculty and staff rarely interact as a group. For example, there may be many staff who only see one another at monthly faculty meetings. Instead, on a day to day basis, most teachers and staff communicate primarily within their department or wing in their building. There may be department meetings or Professional Learning Communities that act as potential mechanisms for communication. The age of students is another important contextual variable when considering communication systems. In high schools, students become a much more active constituency group, making it important to consider them not only in providing information, but also in gathering input, planning, and making decisions about implementation.

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High school administrators, faculty and students may want to think of communication based on two different functions: (a) to build awareness, buy-in and consensus, and (b) to facilitate and sustain implementation. To initially educate and build consensus among the staff, faculty, students and parents, schools have used strategies such as:

- Use multiple mechanisms for communication (weekly principal newsletters [email], department meetings, grade level teams, PLCs, whole school faculty meetings, morning announcements) to update the variety of teachers, students and staff in the building.
- Leadership Team members attend different department level team meetings to share the idea and obtain consensus that there is a need to implement PBIS. Include information on how PBIS is being successful, how it fits the values of the school/district/community and how it helps the school to achieve their other goals (e.g., graduation, good grades/successful results on state assessment/SAT).
- Share school-wide data (e.g., discipline, attendance) monthly in graphic format and by relevant levels (e.g., grade, racial, ethnic groups) and host conversations about what these data mean and what the school can do to improve these findings. Include discussion on the importance of the accuracy of data, how if not accurate our confidence that data is less and it is unable to provide information that we should act on – this is everyone’s job!

- Use a Gallery Walk (Kennedy, Mimmack, & Flannery, 2012) where faculty work in small groups looking at data and answering, “Here’s what?”, “So what?”, “Now what?”. The Leadership Team can then incorporate the ideas generated into their planning.

Once consensus has been reached, communication focuses more on implementation and sustainability by keeping faculty, students, staff and families informed about what is happening, how things are changing and what they can do to support or provide input on the initiative. This may involve strategies to obtain ongoing input as well as just sharing out of information. Many schools already have standard formats for ongoing communication so these mechanisms can be used (e.g., reader boards, emails, newsletters, morning announcements). Additional strategies for gathering input or maintaining ongoing communication include:

- Information box in teachers’ lounge or near an office where people can drop suggestions.
- After implementing a new practice or strategy, send a quick survey to get input from staff and faculty.
- Dedicate time for a five minute update at each faculty meeting.
- Use of the school message board.
- Students provide a two minute update on the morning announcements.
- Email out the Leadership Team meeting minutes and action plan to all staff members to review.

- During the first few weeks before school starts, walk around to local businesses, check in on issues to be addressed, remind them of your schoolwide expectations and give them a specific poster to hang in their business. Repeat this again early spring.

The third key system that is impacted by high school contextual variables is the **decision system that is supported by data**. Data based decision making is a key component for the implementation and sustainability of PBIS (Coffey & Horner, 2012; Horner, Sugai, & Todd, 2001; McIntosh et al., 2013). Since PBIS relies heavily on data for decision making, the data system needs to be ready to respond. The contextual variable of size directly presents a challenge in the amount of data collected due to the large number of students and faculty. Much of the data is in standard school data systems, so the district or school has already assigned people to enter the data into the systems.

Many existing school data systems have been developed for accountability, such as reporting to the state, school board or public (e.g., attendance, behavior). The standard reports from these data systems may not be what the Team needs for decision making. The Leadership Team will need to take time to understand where they can find the data they need to make good decisions and then develop systems to make those data easily accessible and in a report format useful in their meetings. This can result in working with multiple databases and the individuals that manage them in order to obtain data in a format that can be used for decision making. Strategies and adjustments needed to be made by high

schools in order to have the right data available and accessible for decision making include:

- Expand from only focusing on social behavior to include indicators of academic achievement (course failures, credits earned, etc.) and attendance. Consider the interaction between social and academic behavior. For example, some high schools look at course performance and attendance or truancy rates together to determine if students are performing poorly because they are not attending or if they are present but not performing well. This is an important distinction, as each group will require different interventions.
- Work with individual data managers to develop standard visuals of data to be viewed at their meetings. Some data should be viewed at each meeting (behavior, attendance) but it may make more sense for some data to be reviewed only quarterly (e.g., credit accrual, F rates).
- Examine the percentage of students meeting an identified goal rather than an overall average (e.g., percent of students with at least 90% attendance v. overall attendance percentage, percentage of students passing all classes vs. average GPA) so you can capture a more accurate picture of how students are performing.
- Include students in analyzing the data and providing recommendations to address the data. For example, in one school the advanced math class developed the monthly graphs and tables for Leadership Team meetings and staff meetings. This is aggregated, summarized data so there was no risk of loss of confidentiality and it gave

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the math students an excellent example of the application of their math skills to a relevant, meaningful topic.

Although there are many good ideas that schools have put in place, they may or may not fit your school's context. You can reduce the impact of contextual variables by consid-

ering how each variable will impact the practice or system you are implementing. Below are a series of questions that consider the contextual variables in high schools and can be used by the Leadership Team during development, or during problem solving when something isn't working as planned.

*continued on next page*

**Table 1.** Contextual Variables and Foundational Components

Contextual Variables	FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENTS		
	Leadership	Communication	Data
Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we ensure that there is good representation of all staff and faculty on the leadership team?</li> <li>• Who are the right administrative team members to be involved with PBIS implementation? Who should be the administrative representative on the Leadership Team?</li> <li>• How do decisions get made in an efficient manner and in a way that includes the entire Administrative Team?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we ensure all leadership (principals, deans, department heads) understand and can communicate to their constituents?</li> <li>• Who will take what role in the communication?</li> <li>• When are key times to communicate?</li> <li>• What are the standard communication structures?</li> <li>• Will they work to communicate with all groups of students? Faculty? Staff? Community?</li> <li>• How does the building layout impact communication for this practice/system?</li> <li>• Have we identified who needs to know/be involved?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What data will we have? Need?</li> <li>• How will we manage the large amount of data?</li> <li>• What are your data guidelines (e.g., number of students? Number of ODRs?)</li> </ul>
Organizational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role can leadership play in promoting the beliefs/values?</li> <li>• How can leadership the stage for how problem solving takes place or how decisions are made?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the values/beliefs of our school/district/community?</li> <li>• How do these support/hinder the practice/system?</li> <li>• What needs to be communicated to bridge between current beliefs/values?</li> <li>• What examples/language can be used?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information (data) is available to support change in beliefs? Practices?</li> </ul>
Developmental Age of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What authentic role do students have in the leadership of this?</li> <li>• Have we sought student input in the design and roll out of procedures?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role can the students play in development or implementation or problem solving?</li> <li>• How is it best to communicate about the practice/system with the students?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role can the students play in the use of data for decision-making? Can students be involved to inform leadership team about current 'situations' in the building/community that might be impacting behaviors?</li> </ul>

In summary, while there is no change to the PBIS features or framework when implementing in high schools (e.g., Bohanon et al., 2006; Bohanon et al., 2012; Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014; Flannery, Frank, Doren, Kato, & Fenning, 2013; Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010; Swain-Bradway et al., 2015), there is an impact on the implementation process due to the added complexity of the high school context. This can influence the sequence of implementation, the resources needed for implementation and the time it may take to put a practice or system in place. In fact, Flannery,

Frank, Doren, Kato, & Fenning (2013) indicated in our work with eight high schools that though the schools showed improvements by the end of year one, it took a minimum of two years to achieve statistically significant and meaningful changes in the full implementation of PBIS practices. As Leadership Teams work to implement and sustain PBIS practices and systems, it is critical to consider the contextual influence of the size, organizational culture and the age of the students, especially on the three key systems of leadership, data and communication.

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## CHAPTER THREE

# Effective District Supports for High School Implementation of PBIS

**Steve Goodman**

MICHIGAN'S INTEGRATED BEHAVIOR AND LEARNING SUPPORT INITIATIVE (MIBLSI)

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This chapter is written with three audiences in mind. The first is the district administrators and district leadership team who can ensure that high school PBIS is implemented correctly and sustained over time. The second is high school leadership teams who may use this information to be better consumers in requesting supports from district administration. The third is for technical assistance providers at the regional or state level who seek to strengthen a systems effort between the high school and district level.

Over the past decade, there has been a greater understanding of the unique characteristics of effective PBIS that promote successful outcomes within high schools. Common across all schools implementing PBIS (no matter the student grade level) is the emphasis on creating environments that are predictable, consistent, positive, and safe. As indicated in other chapters of this monograph, there are specific features within high schools that require special atten-

tion, and adaptation to the context of the school. It is possible for a high school to implement PBIS with little or no additional support from the district. However, pace of implementation, fidelity, and ability to sustain implementation can be greatly improved through district supports. The direction and actions of the district leadership can enhance implementation efforts (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

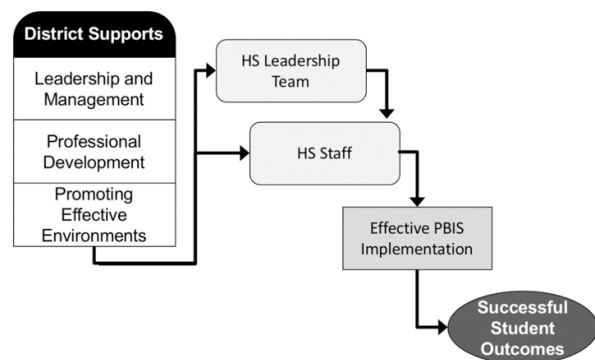
There are a number of benefits associated with developing effective PBIS implementation supports at the district level. Strong district support and guidance for PBIS can enhance successful outcomes and the sustainability of PBIS implementation efforts (George & Kincaid, 2008). With the district assistance, high schools can improve PBIS efforts by making implementation more efficient and easy to do. School districts provide greater impact through political support. This political support is demonstrated when district executive administrators

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publicly state support for high school PBIS and are actively involved in key planning meetings. District administrators and the school board can establish district-wide policy to guide efforts and increase accountability. An example of policy support is embedding PBIS within the district policy handbook on code of conduct or disciplinary procedures. Such policies emphasize a proactive and preventative approach that is the basis for high school PBIS. Districts can centralize and streamline action planning and decision making. Districts have the power to efficiently organize/distribute resources, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities. District administrators can promote PBIS visibility at a higher level than would be possible at the school. Districts can also provide opportunities for schools to learn from and support each other's successes and challenges. The district features and activities necessary to promote effective implementation at the school level have been identified in detail through the *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Implementation Blueprint* (<http://bit.ly/PBISBlueprint>) (George & Kincaid, 2008; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2015).

Three main categories of support provided from the district for individuals in high school settings are illustrated in Figure 1. By providing *Leadership and Management*, the district can help educators understand what it means to effectively implement PBIS and why this is important for the district and for the high school. Additionally, the district can make cer-

tain that supports will be provided to high school personnel to achieve success. The district further supports PBIS implementation through the coordination of student transition from middle school to high school, addressing alignment of behavior expectations and behavior support plans across schools. The district may directly provide *Professional Development* to high school educators or may arrange for appropriate access to professional learning activities. Professional development ensures that educators have the competency to employ PBIS correctly. The district influences the workplace by *Promoting Effective Environments*. Successful work environments can help to make it easy and desirable to implement PBIS. These three categories of supports are necessary so that PBIS can be implemented at a level of fidelity necessary for students to benefit from these effective structures and practices. The categories of district support (Leadership and Management, Professional Development, and Promoting Effective Environments) are elaborated in further detail below.



**Figure 1.** District Supports for High School PBIS Implementation

### Leadership and Management

A significant way to enhance implementation of PBIS in high schools is the development of a leadership team at the district level to provide direction, guidance, coordination and vision. A leadership team can be characterized as individuals whose collective behaviors are directed toward a common goal and maintained by a common outcome (Skinner, 1953). A district leadership team can make the connections with the work of PBIS across classrooms, schools within the district and also connections with regional and state level organizations. A leadership team may be the executive or cabinet level administration. Examples include: superintendent, assistance superintendent or directors. Alternatively, a team may be established with various district staff. In this second team variation, it is important to include a representative from the executive administrative level with decision making authority and who can provide communication back to the cabinet level administrative team. A district leadership team should also include individuals with skill in managing initiatives and those with content expertise in PBIS. A product of the district leadership team is a PBIS support plan that makes implementation both easy and durable. The district leadership team should designate a PBIS coordinator to facilitate the meetings and track progress on the implementation plan.

#### Leadership and Management

Providing support to educators in what it means to do PBIS, why to do it and providing assistance to get it done.

### *Vision*

The leadership team provides a vision for PBIS with a clear connection to the broader mission and goals for the district and more specifically for the high school. The vision should reflect the values of the school, district and community. A thoughtful direction for the implementation of PBIS adds credibility to the work. The vision includes a description of staff involvement, family/school community involvement and identified outcomes. This association of PBIS and district purpose, goals, and values can set the stage for educators to contribute to alignment, political support and funding allocation for the work to take place.

### *Commitment and Political Support*

High school adoption of PBIS is enhanced when there is public commitment and support by the district administration, district leadership team and the district's board of education. It is important that the district commits to at least five years of support for high school PBIS. District leadership can provide visible political support through written and verbal communication. This may include press releases, presentations, participation in high school PBIS events and connecting PBIS to district policies. For example, the district may schedule an annual school board presentation for the high school PBIS team to provide updates on implementation activities and student impact related

to PBIS. This same district incorporates PBIS into their policy on addressing problem behavior and use of suspension. The superintendent shares with the school community the percent of reduction in use of suspensions as a result of high school PBIS.

### *Securing Funding and Allocation of Resources*

Estimated costs for PBIS implementation range from \$5,400 to \$12,400 to get PBIS up and running in schools (*Economic Costs Analysis* [<http://bit.ly/PBISCosts>]; Swain-Bradway, Lindstrom Johnson, Bradshaw, & McIntosh, 2017). The expense of PBIS implementation includes coordination, training and coaching. Additional costs are associated with management of data, related data systems, resource materials, and program incentives. Some of these expenditures are associated with new components of implementing PBIS while others may involve the reallocation of existing funds and resources. District leadership can more efficiently assign and distribute finite resources from the district level to implementation efforts.

### *Coordination*

A meaningful support for schools is the coordination of PBIS activities. One example involves braiding and leveraging activities in an aligned manner for improved efficiency. In many cases, alignment decisions are beyond the authority of the school team. It can be difficult to combine programs or eliminate ineffective or competing initiatives without the permission or approval from district administration. District

leadership can help make room (e.g., allow time and adjust job requirements) for the PBIS work to take place. Making room often requires the reduction of demands from other initiatives that compete for staff time. For example, district leadership may discontinue districtwide initiatives that produce little or no significant outcomes according to the data so that more time can be spent on implementing PBIS. The district can also make a point of not taking on any new initiatives to provide a greater focus on PBIS. If a new initiative or mandate is being considered, it is helpful for the district and school teams to carefully think about how to align with PBIS (Technical Guide for Alignment [<http://bit.ly/SDAlignment>]; National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, 2017). Alignment may take place regarding program philosophy and the underlying logic of initiatives. Additionally, alignment may take place with respect to terminology, professional development, implementation of the initiative practices, and the evaluation process. For instance, a high school may have an initiative that focuses on character building and integrity. Alignment involves connecting PBIS behavior expectations to character development, noting that both initiatives are similar in helping students to understand appropriate actions that reflect positive, prosocial skills. For example, our high school builds character when students are respectful, responsible and productive. PBIS helps to teach and encourage these expectations. As district staff train educators in the different initiatives, associations are made that

focus on commonalities and shared goals for these approaches.

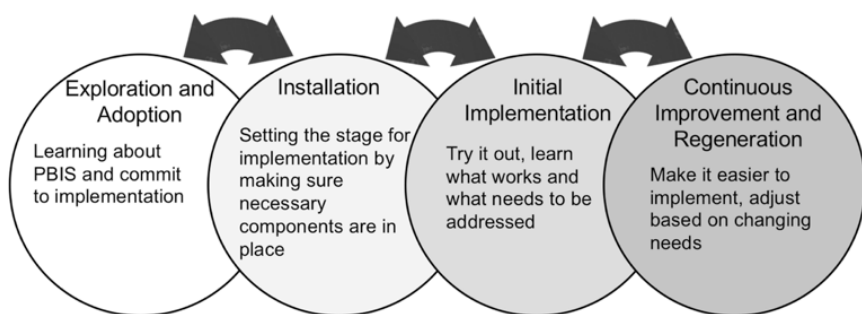
The district can similarly assist with demands associated with evaluation. The use of assessments and evaluation are key elements in PBIS (Algozzine, et al., 2010). Educators use data for identifying students for more intensive supports, assessment for behavior intervention planning and monitoring of student progress as well as monitoring the fidelity of the intervention. The district can help coordinate the use of evaluation within the district's master assessment schedule and with the district's comprehensive evaluation plan to support both students and staff. Furthermore, the district can remove redundant data collection procedures to create a more streamlined approach. For example, one district leadership team worked with the technology department to ensure that a discipline referral has one point of data entry into the district's data system. This reduced multiple forms to be completed for each discipline referral. Another district team combined multiple student surveys that evaluated school climate into one assessment tool.

Districts also play a valuable role in facilitating the high school through stages of implementation. High school PBIS takes place through a process of stages rather than a single event (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Freeman, Miller, & Newcomer, 2015; Horner & Sugai, 2006). These stages are delineated in Figure 2 below. Although the figure

displays each stage a linear representation, it is more accurate that implementation moves forward or backward depending on how well the previous stage was established. Sometimes there are occurrences that will necessitate returning to earlier stage of implementation (e.g., staff turnover, adoption of a new mandate). Too frequently, there are pressures (from administrators, families, or community partners) to move quickly to the implementation stage. However, quickening installation and jumping to implementation is unlikely to produce a durable, fully implemented PBIS framework. It is important that district administration provide educators with permission to go through stages of implementation.

### *Problem-solving*

In any educational organization there are difficulties that hinder PBIS implementation. The district leadership can partner with school leadership to empower educators to problem-solve based on their understanding of the practical considerations of real-life school settings. There are several features of a problem-solving process that can be facilitated by district leadership (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). The first is to make sure that the school leadership team is involved in problem solving. Second, help the school team fol-



**Figure 2.** Stages of Implementation

low a problem-solving protocol that includes: 1) problem identification, 2) problem clarification, 3) solution planning, 4) goal setting, 5) intervention implementation, and 6) evaluation. A problem-solving collaboration between the school and

district will help educators take ownership with the successful outcomes of PBIS implementation. An example of this problem-solving process with the district and high school leadership team is provided in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Contextual Variables and Foundational Components

Steps for Problem Solving	Key Questions and Actions	Example
1. Problem Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the concern?</li> <li>• Why is it a concern?</li> </ul>	The high school leadership team is troubled that many staff have not “bought into” PBIS. Without commitment, PBIS is unlikely to be implemented correctly and consistently. It will also be difficult to sustain the achievements made to date.
2. Problem Clarification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How big a problem is it?</li> <li>• Why is this problem occurring?</li> </ul>	A recent survey found that 37% of high school teachers do not see how PBIS will improve students grades and course completion. Also, teachers feel that PBIS requires too much time and the district is not very supportive.
3. Solution Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can we do to address the problem?</li> </ul>	<p>The high school and district leadership create a plan that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing data on the number of discipline referrals and the instructional time lost due to addressing problem behavior.</li> <li>• Testimonials by high school educators who see value in their experiences when implementing PBIS allowing more time to teach.</li> <li>• Testimonials from students and families that notice a more positive school climate.</li> <li>• District leadership attending and expressing support for PBIS at staff meetings when this information is shared.</li> <li>• District leadership removing other tasks or requirements that compete with PBIS implementation.</li> </ul>
4. Goal Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will we know if we had adequately addressed this problem?</li> </ul>	The leadership team would like at least 85% of high school teachers committed to this work as measured by the staff survey.
5. Intervention Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather resources necessary to address the problem</li> <li>• Apply the intervention</li> </ul>	The high school and district leadership team summarizes the data for a presentation. Individuals are identified and guided on how to effectively communicate their positive experiences with PBIS. Competing tasks are identified and the district develops a plan to eliminate the task requirements or combine and align necessary task requirements. A date is set and the meeting with staff takes place. District leadership follows up with emails stating support for PBIS and continue review of competing initiatives.
6. Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did we do what we said we would?</li> <li>• Did it work?</li> <li>• How can we get better at addressing the problem?</li> </ul>	The leadership team conducts a survey one month and three months after the staff meeting to evaluate changes in staff commitment. Based on feedback, the leadership team plans for a follow-up staff meeting to address additional concerns.

Additional examples of potential barriers to carrying out PBIS include difficulty getting teachers to training (e.g., lack of substitute teachers) or competing initiatives that place task demands on teachers. The district leadership team can help address this issue by clarifying and supporting possible solutions.

The district leadership should promote policy that facilitates and encourages effective implementation of PBIS. To inform policy, district leadership should utilize data, confirmation of local effectiveness, and evidence provided through scientific research. The leadership team periodically reviews policies that might be incompatible with PBIS implementation. For instance, a district might describe policy in the student code of conduct that details consequences for behavior violations with no mention of PBIS. Working with district executive leadership and school board on policy changes to support PBIS efforts.

District leadership can provide meaningful support when high school staff may not be committed to PBIS. The district leadership can reaffirm a clear connection to “need” at school and within the district. Additionally, the district can help gather student and family voice for PBIS support. If the high school principal, assistant principal, or teachers are not committed to the work then the district leadership can increase visibility and priority from executive administration and the school board.

Sometimes, implementation at the high school seems to stall out, with loss of momen-

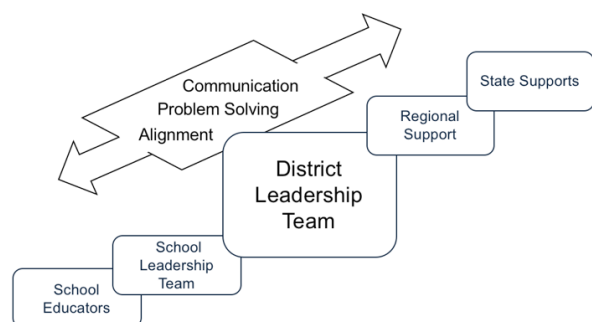
tum or focus on the work. Occasionally, setbacks are caused by political instability. District leadership can help address such problems by revisiting why it is important to implement PBIS. District administration should provide increased visibility for the priorities of PBIS implementation. High school staff may be overwhelmed with so many demands. District leadership can assist by reducing, combining or eliminating initiatives that are not effective, efficient or aligned with district goals. Additionally, the district can help out by leveraging state and regional supports for the high school implementing PBIS.

High schools face staff turnover with school administration, teaching personnel, ancillary support staff and others. When hiring new staff, district leadership can help develop a personnel selection process. This process should include job description postings that desire individuals who have a background in PBIS, are philosophically aligned, and willing to continue the PBIS efforts that are in place. When staff are hired for the school; district leadership should take a role in helping to orient the new personnel in regard to policy and importance of implementing PBIS.

### *Communication*

The district leadership plays an important role in communication with a variety of key stakeholders throughout the PBIS implementation process. Providing frequent, clear and focused communication is the key to fostering trust and increased buy-in for school teams. The district leadership team also communicates across the cascading levels of the educational sys-

tems from the classroom to state department of education. See Figure 3 for illustration of communication across the cascading educational systems. It is helpful to establish standard communication procedures with predictable cycles for updates on PBIS implementation. The continuity of communication is important across time and across the school (i.e., student grade level and course and departments). The leadership team can convey this student/family voice for support. These initiatives may be specific within the district. At high schools, many times initiatives occur across various agencies and community partnerships. The leadership team should also provide regular communication with the district board of education. This is done by providing updates on the status of implementation (fidelity of implementation, perception of impact on school climate, outcomes on student behavior).



**Figure 3.** District Role Across the Cascading Educational System

## Professional Development

High school personnel need to acquire knowledge and skills so that PBIS can be implemented with fidelity. To build expertise, districts

## Professional Development

Providing support to educators in how to do PBIS.

must develop the capacity to deliver quality training and provide on-going technical assistance to improve competency across all educators within the school (Lewis, Barrett, Sugai, Horner, Mitchell, & Starkey, 2016). A recent metasynthesis of research on in-service professional development identified key components with implications for effective PBIS learning (Dunst, Bruder, & Hamby, 2015). These components include: (a) clear explanations of PBIS content; (b) opportunities for practice of PBIS content, knowledge, and practices with learning opportunities directly relevant to the school setting; (c) coaching and performance feedback during training; (d) repeated opportunities for professional development; and (e) ongoing follow-up supports for implementation within schools. The district should collaborate with the high school leadership team to create a professional development plan that addresses the key components stated above.

## Training

District leadership acts to ensure access to quality training to develop knowledge and skills in PBIS. The district training plan considers support for all educators who are learning PBIS and also for new staff to the high school. District leadership can play a role in identifying and selecting individuals who will provide

training to school personnel. Trainers may come from within the district using social workers, psychologists or behavior specialists. Trainers from outside the district could be provided by consultants from the regional intermediary unit, from university, or from the state department of education.

### *Coaching*

Coaching is an effective district support provided to ensure that skills developed in training are then transferred to the school setting. Core components of coaching include: prompting, fluency building, performance feedback, and adaptation of the new skill to the educational environment (Massar, 2017). It is important that the individuals providing coaching understand the unique features and needs for those within high school settings. The district can provide access to variations of coaching (i.e., internal and external). Internal coaches are individuals within the high school. External coaches may be employees from the district or outside of the district. Coaching can take place for the school leadership team, classroom teachers and also for school administration (principal, assistant principal). The district can help to develop a coaching delivery plan that contextualizes supports to the high school. Chapter 4 explains in further detail the nuances of coaching in high schools.

### *Technical Assistance*

In order to support schools, the district leadership identifies and provides content experts to assist educators who are struggling with an

implementation problem. An expert with specific content knowledge provides information to address an identified need with customized solutions. One example for content expertise is conducting a technically sound functional behavior assessment and linking results to a behavior support plan. The content expert is often provided at the district, regional or state level.

### **Promoting Effective Environments within the School**

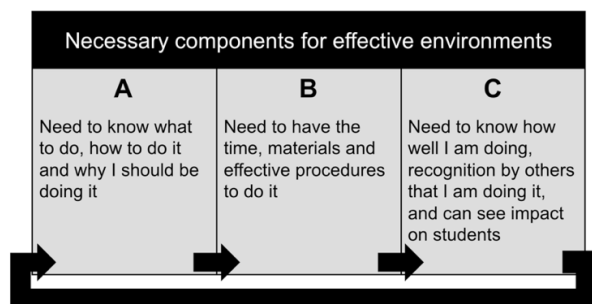
Effective workplaces can foster successful implementation of PBIS. Successful work environments make it easy to apply PBIS well by ensuring that educators know what needs to be done, have adequate resources to do it and can experience the results of effective implementation efforts. Figure 3 illustrates the foundational needs of an educator to implement PBIS practices well. The sequence focuses on what an educator requires before, during, and after implementing PBIS practices in order to

#### **Promoting Effective Environments within the School**

Supporting educators by making it easy to do PBIS in the right way.

do this correctly, consistently and repeatedly. The basic foundation for effective work environments can be provided by the school leadership with enhancements by the district leadership. Leadership teams at the school and district need

to work together to enable educators to be effective in each of these unique settings.



**Figure 4.** Needs of an Educator to Implement PBIS Practices Effectively

### Information

Educators need to be provided with adequate information so that they know what is expected to implement PBIS successfully in high schools. The district can help educators understand the expectations that PBIS is important to the district. The leadership can establish district-wide policy to guide efforts & increase accountability. An example of providing essential information is having the district leadership team work with the high school staff to develop a schedule for teaching and reviewing the school wide behavior expectations. The district may help with various prompts through the year for educators to teach and review behavior expectations or acknowledge appropriate student behavior.

### Materials and Procedures

The district can help the school create standard processes and procedures for the implementation of PBIS. Practices should require the least effort necessary to produce the desired outcome. For example, rather than having each individ-

ual educator create individual lesson plans for teaching behavior expectations, the district can delegate a workgroup to develop lesson plans and share with others. Instead of having teachers attend multiple meetings on committees, the district can combine committees that serve the same function or work towards the same or similar outcomes. PBIS practices are made easier to implement when embedding within other school activities such as school improvement procedures and aligned with district initiatives. District leadership uses resources to coordinate the development and/or distribution of PBIS related materials that will be beneficial for the implementation within high school settings. The district leadership can check with the high school team to make sure behavior expectation posters have been printed to be displayed around the school.

The district needs to help support data systems at the high school level. If the high school uses a data-base subscription service (e.g., School-Wide Information System (SWIS); <http://bit.ly/SWISapp>), the district can help to set up accounts and make sure the accounts are paid and functional. Districts can help align or integrate the district's student information system with a behavior reporting data system. It is important that the district makes sure that educators have access to the data system for all necessary users. The district can also assist by standardizing the forms and discipline referral process across the district. District leadership should protect time for PBIS implementation by eliminating redundant evaluation associated tasks from other initiatives.

### *Encouragement and Feedback*

Educators benefit from positive reinforcement and acknowledgement to encourage continued implementation of PBIS. This is particularly true when individuals are new to these practices or the school is just beginning implementation efforts. District leadership can influence staff to implement PBIS through recognition, reward, reinforcement, and relationships (Daniels, 2016). When properly designed and implemented, acknowledgement can be powerful when tied to specific behavior, timely and meaningful for the staff. Additionally, performance feedback is essential to improving fidelity of implementation and continuous improvement of the program. It is challenging to implement PBIS well if you do not know how you are doing in the process. District leadership can provide status of PBIS implementation shared at monthly staff meetings with encouragement from the district.

### **Conclusion and Future Recommendations**

Although our understanding of PBIS implementation has improved significantly, there are still a number of questions that remain. For example, high schools vary greatly (e.g., enrollment, geographic location, availability of resources) as do the districts in which the schools are located. Given the variations, how do we support high school implementation in smaller, rural schools with limited resources? It is likely that implementation is enhanced when aligned and leveraged by regional or state sup-

ports. Professional development is a necessary component of preparing high school educators for implementation of PBIS. There is an emphasis on keeping teachers in the classroom rather than attending training during the school day. How can we utilize other formats for professional development? It may be beneficial for districts to invest in alternative professional development activities that might include online learning or “blended” learning with both virtual learning and in person training sessions.

Districts play a significant role in supporting the implementation of PBIS in high schools. This support is critical for implementation success because as McLaughlin & Talbert (2003) state, “districts matter fundamentally to what goes on in schools and classrooms”. It is likely that schools that are adequately supported by the district are more likely to produce fidelity of implementation (across all through tiers of support), have more engaged educators, and sustain implementation efforts longer than schools implementing without district support.

### **Story From the Field**

It was a hot and humid day in May. The high school principal asked me to talk to of eighty of the school’s faculty and staff. We met in the media center and people we seated all around the room in various configurations. This had been a busy week of testing. The looks on each educator’s face communicated that it was a long day at the end of a challenging year. The principal introduced me as being from the state, here to help by “telling us how to do PBIS”. Many were less than excited about the possibility on yet another

## CHAPTER THREE

new initiative interfering with their ability to effectively teach. Unfortunately, the meeting did not go as well as we hoped. Adoption of PBIS seemed like a fleeting dream. Teachers did not see why this proposed approach was even necessary. Additionally, there was the perception that past initiatives were not adequately supported. In fact, much of the time, district leadership seemed unaware of the challenges that teachers face in this high school setting.

Fortunately, a few key individuals saw the potential impact that PBIS could provide for the high school staff and students. During the summer and fall, a high school leadership team was formed. This team met with district administration to collaborate on a plan to explore what supports would be essential to help teachers implement PBIS correctly and consistently. The team gathered data from the school, district, and community to illustrate the need to improve school climate and recover instructional time lost to dealing with problem behavior. The district helped develop a plan for training in PBIS. The team identified district staff who can deliver PBIS coaching and made sure that these individuals had the time to provide this function. The district team also met with the school board to introduce PBIS and craft a statement of support for districtwide implementation.

A meeting was scheduled for late fall for the entire high school staff. Members of the high school leadership team and the district administration set the stage by providing information on student, staff, and family perception of the school climate. They shared the time and energy that was spent on addressing student behav-

ior and how this interferes with class instruction. The district administrators talked about why implementation of PBIS is important for the district and is supported by administration and the school board. Details of how other high schools demonstrated successful results through PBIS were shared by teachers from the leadership team. District administrators shared a plan of how this work would be supported. As a result, eighty percent of the high school faculty and staff committed to implementation of PBIS.

Over the next few years, the district worked with the school team to develop skills, provide PBIS materials and resources and create an environment that makes it easy to implement PBIS well. The journey was not always easy. There were challenges of staff turn-over, budget cuts, and additional mandates. The district team was careful to implement an evaluation plan that focused on fidelity of implementation to learn the impact of PBIS and how to work to make it better. The district created communication protocols so that implementation barriers can be brought to the district to be addressed. By investing in systems for continuous improvement, educators felt like PBIS was supported at all levels.

Eventually, PBIS became a point of pride for the high school. Student success was shared with other high schools. The district helped the school to keep momentum going with new staff and students. The program continued far beyond previous initiatives. The high school PBIS program was even highlighted in a video that was sent onto the White House in response to a U. S. Government program.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# Coaching PBIS in High Schools: Skills, Strategies, and Lessons Learned

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Coaching as a model for professional development gained momentum during the 1990's when federal legislation focused on literacy improvement. At this point, coaching positions became formalized in terms of roles, responsibilities, and funding (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). At the time this was a relatively new way to deliver professional development, especially for reading. Over the past 30 years coaching has gained popularity and now extends beyond teaching reading in the classroom. It is now clear that providing professional development in context, with ongoing support yields the greatest outcomes. Coaching is now being used to support teachers with instructional skills, classroom management strategies. For the purpose of this chapter, coaching is used to support effective and efficient implementation of school-wide Positive Behavior intervention and Supports (PBIS) with adherence to fidelity. In this chapter we highlight the roles and responsibilities of a PBIS coach, discuss characteristics

and skills of an effective coach, and share lessons learned from a randomized control trial involving 61 high schools. Additionally, we include a discussion from Erin Matheson, High School Coach for Charleston Public Schools in South Carolina. She shares some of the unique features associated with coaching high schools. We believe that while coaching has common features across all settings, effectively coaching high schools warrants a discussion that focuses on unique nuances and contextual considerations addressed in Chapter 2.

### Coaching Defined

First, we must define coach. We can describe the word 'coach' as a noun and a verb. A 'coach' is someone with knowledge of a particular content who has the ability to provide direction for others to become fluent with that content and enact a plan for moving from knowledge into application (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). In the case of PBIS implementation, a coach is

someone who is fluent with the use of data for decision making, competencies and skills that are necessary to install and sustain a particular practice, and the knowledge about how a school functions in order to establish systems that support effective implementation.

‘To coach’, is the act of articulating the knowledge, support a team of individuals in acquiring that knowledge, applying it to a particular context (school- level, district-level, state- level) and putting in to action the steps necessary to move towards fidelity of implementation, positioned to build local capacity and ensure that along the way steps are taken to promote sustainability of the efforts.

### Characteristics and Skills of an Effective Coach

Massar (2017) identifies four key components of coaching: prompting, fluency building, performance feedback, and adaptation of the new skill to the educational environment. These components help identify the behaviors that coaches need to engage in to deliver effective coaching. They components have been researched and determined to be effective in supporting teams (Discussed further in Chapter 3). However, if we look to the research for guidance on characteristics of effective coaches, there is not

#### Coaching Tip

Relationship building is constant. It’s a job that is NEVER finished.

a lot of conclusive evidence to inform us about the specific qualities effective coaches possess. That said, there are sources that offer guidance and are useful in understanding and supporting the coaching process. Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence (date), considers coaching one of the most important leadership styles and describes it as the “ability to foster the long-term learning or development of others by giving feedback and support.” In his book, Goleman describes five characteristics of an effective coach. They are the ability to: provide and accept feedback, develop trust, be a good listener, broker resources and apply professional knowledge.

#### *Provide and Receive Feedback*

Coaching is a different type of leadership style than many people are accustomed to because it includes feedback along with support. Those assigned to be high school coaches may be ready to give their colleagues support, but due to their previous experiences (e.g., classroom teacher), the coach may be unaccustomed to providing feedback. Additionally, people serving as coaches are not necessarily accustomed to receiving feedback. Often the people who are providing building or district based coaching are not in administrative positions, rather they are the teacher from down the hall or the former teacher from down the hall. Additionally,

#### Coaching Tip

Before providing feedback ALWAYS ask “what kind of feedback would be most helpful right now?” (Gowland, L. 2018)

the team members “being coached” may or may not have volunteered to be on the PBIS team so they may or may not be interested in receiving support/feedback from someone considered a peer. In the end, the building and maintaining relationships will always be a critical part of being a coach.

### *Build Trust*

When we reached out to those in the field and asked the question, “what makes a good coach?”, we discovered that overwhelmingly teachers reported the most important characteristic of a coach was trustworthiness. The foundation of building and maintaining relationships is allowing space and time for the coach to get to know the people on the team, understand why they are on the team, as well as, what belief systems they hold about the ability of systems and people to change and be successful. Another foundational piece of building and maintaining relationships is allowing the team members to get to know you and what experiences you bring to the table. Ultimately, people need to trust before they will allow an individual the space to provide coaching.

### *Good Listener*

Stanier (2016), author of *The Coaching Habit*, identifies being a good listener as a critical skill for effective coaches. So what does it mean to be a good listener? Jim Knight offers 3 questioning strategies that can be helpful when supporting and problem-solving with teams. The 3 questioning strategies are:

1. Be curious

2. Ask open-ended, opinion questions
3. Remain non-judgmental

As a coach, it would be helpful if we took time to reflect on which of the skills we are using and determine which of the skills we could improve upon. As coaches we can demonstrate giving 100% of our attention by putting our phone away or on vibrate, closing the lid on our computer, providing eye contact with team members, maintaining our focus on the speaker and waiting our turn to take part in the conversation. Listening to understand, rather than to respond means avoiding the temptation to create a response while listening. This requires taking

#### **Coaching Tip**

To ensure the person or group you are coaching feels supported, rather than interrogated, when you begin, ask one question at a time rather than “drive-by” questioning and after you ask one question, be quiet and wait for the answer. (Stanier, 2016)

time to allow for people to fully express themselves, including allowing for pauses and reflection during conversation. An open mind as a coach means putting assumptions and pre-conceived notions aside while listening. Coaches should assume positive intent and provide people with the benefit of the doubt and avoid shaming or blaming people. Being aware of what is not being said as well as what is being said suggests the coach is attuned to both the words

the speaker is saying, as well as the emotions. Additionally, a good coach listens to determine if the team/team members are truly interested in and see a need for change. Being aware of differences and similarities, a coach is required to recognize that all schools and their staff have their own culture. There may be similarities between buildings, but it is crucial to see each school and school staff as having their own individual differences. For example, high school teachers, by organization, are accustomed to working collaboratively with those in the same department or as grade level teams. The concept of school-wide requires some shifts in thinking, from individual to group. Traditionally, high school teachers focus on individual student progress as opposed to progress (or challenges) in aggregate; freshman boys or sophomore girls. School spirit, traditions, and pride impact the way high schools approach change. Perhaps because of athletic rivals, or academic comparisons, there is a general sense of competition between high schools. This is especially true within districts. An effective coach will listen and learn from the lens of a professional who operates in this organizational structure and support rather than force change. For that reason, among others, it is crucial that a coach avoids comparing school and school staff with other locations.

### *Broker Resources*

An effective coach is one who has the skill to broker resources and content knowledge fluency (Stanier, 2016). As a coach, resource brokering means being able to offer resources and connections to resources that are a culturally rel-

evant and a good contextual fit. This includes offering examples of what other high schools have successfully implemented as well as challenges other high schools have faced. Both what has been successful and not successful has the potential to open an opportunity for the team to explore ideas and build off of others experiences. It is important as a coach to know when it is time to offer resources and when it is time to step back and allow the team to generate their own ideas and resources. As a coach we are constantly walking a fine line between being helpful and being intrusive.

### *Apply Professional Knowledge*

Certainly, it is important to have knowledge about PBIS features and the key components necessary for implementation. But knowing PBIS is not enough to be a good coach in the high school. Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) have shared that to have strong implementation one must be knowledgeable about the features and must understand and acknowledge the context. Often districts will move a coach that is excellent at the elementary level and very knowledgeable about

#### **Coaching Tip**

Stop offering up advice with a question mark attached! If you've got an idea, wait. Ask, "And what else?" and you'll often find that the person comes up with that very idea that's burning a hole in your brain. And if she doesn't, then offer your idea—as an idea, not disguised as a fake question. (Stanier, 2016).

PBIS but then fails at providing that same effective coaching in the high school. Knowledge about the unique contextual features about high schools – knowledge about the infrastructure, vocabulary and contextual influences that impact implementation is a critical. This will impact the implementation due to a) lack of clear communication processes, a) multiple data systems that not all team members have access to, and c) a team of administrators who all need to be informed and supportive of the initiative (Chapter 2).

In absence of this knowledge, the above-mentioned characteristics can be compromised. For example, not understanding the unique nature of high schools can inhibit the development of trust between school teams and the coach. The coach is also limited in his/her ability to accurately determine what resources are most helpful to solve identified problems. Effective high school coaching is dependent upon knowing the audience and recognizing that the differences go beyond simple modification of current training protocols used with elementary schools. In Chapter 2, three unique contextual considerations are explained: size, culture and developmental level. It is important that a coach take these in to consideration when working with teams. We have provided a tool, *Consider Context: Implementation in Secondary Schools* [<http://bit.ly/PBISContext>], which offers questions that coaches can use to further explore each of these. The questions are intended to serve as a guide for coaches to help both school level teams and district level leaders identify and respond to potential challenges that

might be attributed to specific high school contextual factors.

### **Lessons Learned: Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools High School Project**

In 2011, Maryland received the US Department of Education, Safe and Supportive Schools grant aimed at supporting the improvement of school climate in high schools. Sixty-one high schools participated in a randomized control trial whereby each school received direct coaching support from external coaches. The participating high schools were expected to use data from their climate survey to identify their specific areas of need. Schools were then provided a menu of evidence-based interventions (practices) to choose from, each of which targeted one of the three domains: school safety, promoting conditions for learning (environment), or student engagement. Finally, prior to implementation of the selected practices coaches helped teams self-assess readiness and ensured the necessary supports for adults (systems) were in place to optimize implementation of the practices. Coaches recorded details of their site visits in coaching logs that captured information about the type of tasks performed and the amount of time spent in each of the 29 focus high schools over the three years of the project.

### **Administrative Support for Coaching**

First and foremost it was clear from the beginning of the project that administrative support was critical. Research and experience tells us

that successful implementation and sustainability of PBIS is highly dependent on administrative support and engagement (Adelman and Taylor, 2007). Even when schools are voluntarily implementing PBIS (as opposed to district mandates), coaches face resistance for various reasons: protectiveness (the classroom is my domain), resistance to change, concerns about trust (questions about why the coach is in the classroom observing) and perhaps confusion about the whole reason a coach is in the building. The Principal is key in creating an environment where change is safe and welcomed. Visible support for the initiative is critical and this can be as simple as (a) including the coach at school-wide faculty meetings and clarifying for staff the purpose and the role he/she plays, (b) ensuring PBIS is a standing agenda item, (c) providing the coach with a mailbox or office space and/or (d) adding the coach to the school list-serve to receive school news and updates. These efforts communicate to the faculty that the coach is welcome and that implementing PBIS with external support is the way of work in the building. Given some high schools no longer have schoolwide faculty meetings, the Principal needed to share information and demonstrate his support at smaller meetings such as departmental and/or grade level team meetings. Listed below are some ways that administrators can support a move toward developing a culture of coaching.

- Explore research around the effectiveness of a coaching model and share with the staff
- Provide input into the SELECTION of building level and district level coach/coaches

- Allocate time for coaches to successfully fulfill their roles
- Develop job descriptions specific for coaches
- Schedules time to meet with coaches and reflect on a regular basis (weekly/biweekly)
- Develop written policies and procedures to evaluate coaching performance
- Orientation and support is provided for new coaches
- Solicit formal feedback from teachers who receiving coaching services
- Revise policies and procedures to support both the EBP (Evidence based practice) and the Coaching system
- Document barriers to coaching

Analysis of the coaching log data indicated that the most 'time in building' actually occurred in year two. Coaches reported that in some of the schools there was some apprehension about having an 'outsider' attending meetings and being involved with the school-wide data. Given that initial reluctance the decision was made to work at establishing the trust of the teams and leadership. This approach positioned the coaches to be much more engaged with teams during year two when much of the actual implementation of interventions took place. The coaches all agreed that 'going slow' in year one allowed them to 'go fast' during year two. During year three, the final year of the project, coaches intentionally pulled back on the intensity of visits as soon as they determined teams had the capacity to operate independently. This

was done in an effort to promote capacity building and ultimately foster sustainability.

Additionally, the coaches entered the types of tasks they performed during site visits. These included: teaming supports, staff training, staff support, coaching data use, examining fidelity, and administrative tasks. Administrative tasks included making copies, entering data, in some cases covering a class, and participating in family/community events. In year one training, staff support, and examining fidelity were the most frequently delivered services. This may have occurred through suggestions at team meetings, 1:1 meetings with principal or facilitator, gathering information and examples from other high schools. Year two there was a much stronger call for support with data use/decision making. Teams became much more comfortable involving the coaches in the data-based decision making. The coaches also realized early on that there was a significant need for supporting teams in developing the skills to problem solve in a meaningful way using data. While the high school teams were accustomed to using academic data to identify problems and develop solutions, this was not the case with discipline data. Coaches held a project-wide “data day” training event and teams spent the day working with their own data. They created a simple dashboard that organized data from various sources which allowed the teams to streamline what they targeted for improvement. Teams reported this was the single most helpful support they received throughout the project. School teams also learned to develop precision statements as part of the problem-solving cycle, a process that allows for con-

tinuous improvement. Finally, school teams received coaching in order to create an action plan to move the work forward.

During years two and three the coaches focused more on actual implementation of practices and systems development. Progress towards these goals happened much quicker than year one because teams were able to engage in data-based decision making that provided insight into both student outcomes and fidelity of implementation. Teams reported that fluency with data allowed them to better understand potential roadblocks to implementation and address those concerns in an informed way. For example, if the solution plan to decrease tardies included adult supervision in the hallways, then it was important for the team to assess whether or not this indeed happened. In order to make that determination teams created mechanisms for evaluating fidelity which included: self-reporting by teachers and walkthroughs by administrators .... Teams also reported being more comfortable allowing the coaches access to various locations/offices, data sets, and primarily the classrooms.

Additionally, during years two and three there was a significant increase in requests for the coach to do more administrative tasks (e.g., copying, test proctoring...). While helping out with some of the administrative tasks is perhaps helpful to build relationships and show support, we do not recommend this become a normal responsibility of the coach. Coaches are uniquely trained to support implementation of PBIS and their time is best spent focusing on the tasks that directly impact that. It is important to establish that expectation early to ensure the coaches time

is spent coaching. This is especially true when coaches are assigned to multiple buildings.

Table 1 illustrates some of the common challenges many of the high schools in the proj-

ect experienced and strategies coaches employed to address some of the challenges. You will notice that many of these challenges align with the contextual considerations discussed in Chapter 2.

**Table 1.** Common Coaching Challenges and Strategies

Area	Challenges	Strategies/Ideas/Actions
Building a Data Culture in High Schools Data Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of access to data               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gatekeeper withholds access</li> <li>• Administrative support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lack of understanding/interest</li> <li>• No data being tracked (school-wide discipline in aggregate)</li> <li>• No data system to gather data in a meaning way/layout</li> <li>• Denial about the accuracy of data – staff not believing the data (“there can’t be that much bullying in our building)</li> <li>• Need for skills development using discipline data for decision making (even with use of academic data is a strength)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put data on the agenda!</li> <li>• Frequent reminders to team members to enter, review, problem solve and bring to meetings.</li> <li>• Highlight 1 data source each month to build fluency (coach supported)</li> <li>• Structured activity in analyzing data (coach teaches team how to use data for decision making through activities (I do, we, do, eventually you do)</li> <li>• Delegate the responsibility of data to different people on team while fluency is being developed (cross-train to address potential turnover)</li> <li>• Summer training (both large group and within schools focused on data use. We called ours “Dabbling in Discipline Data” and included all staff to promote buy-in.</li> </ul>
Installing Practices to Support Student Behavior Coaching to Install Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator buy in, support (time for staff and funds) critical!               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admin buy-in promotes faculty buy-in</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identifying the ‘hidden leaders’ and encouraging their buy-in</li> <li>• Sustainability in the absence of resources</li> <li>• Recognizing (and helping schools) readiness features</li> <li>• Expect change overnight</li> <li>• The paradigm of serving students in small groups (Tier 2) rather than individuals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District support is critical (resource allocation - both FTE and funding)</li> <li>• Include multiple stakeholders in the planning and implementation processes</li> <li>• Networking schools w/other schools (bring high schools implementing the same practice together to collaborate and jointly problem solve)</li> <li>• Big picture thinking – fidelity likely takes 3-5 years.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outcomes may be further down the road</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Link all to the school improvement plan and district strategic plan</li> <li>• Review effectiveness of intervention using data in aggregate (don’t just monitor student outcomes – rather review what % of students in a practice are responding and question the fidelity of the intervention first when large numbers of students do not respond)</li> </ul>
Strengthening Systems to Support Staff Systems Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of teaming structures</li> <li>• Tradition of isolation</li> <li>• Ineffective communication pathways</li> <li>• Release time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each school is in a different phase-make sure you are also in that phase.</li> <li>• Implementing step 2 before step 1 isn’t always a bad thing</li> <li>• Train staff in the EBPs – it increases buy in</li> <li>• Patience and Persistence</li> </ul>

### **Voices from the Field: Charleston County Public Schools**

From the systems level, the high school is a place where things have been done the same way for a long time. Tradition informs how the adults see their roles and responsibilities specific to educating adolescents. These include for example, the way students are selected/non-selected in to various classes, how students are disciplined for their actions, the rituals, (i.e. Homecoming, Prom, Pep Rallies, Spirit Week, Clubs, Yearbooks, and Graduation). The beliefs and attitudes about students shared by educators in high school are seemingly imprinted into the fabric of how high schools operate. The size of the school and the community the school serves plays in to the systemic operation of the school (Chapter 2). The preparedness of the incoming freshmen has an impact and often requires high schools to provide additional supports and resources to help students through that important transition time (Chapter 6). And of course the diversity of the students (socio-economic factors, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, variability in achievement/ability) (Chapter 8) is an important consideration that needs to be addressed through the PBIS initiative. All of these factors make for a complex environment that a coach must keep in mind as they work to meet the needs of a particular school.

For me, as a High School Climate Coach (aka PBIS and MTSS Implementation Coach) for nine very different high school in Charleston County School District, keeping a systems perspective and reminding myself of the complexi-

ties that are unique in each building has helped me differentiate my supports with each of my schools as they embarked on initial implementation of PBIS. Below are a few of the challenges I met with and some lessons I learned.

I knew right from the start that there were two major hurdles that we needed to get past. First, PBIS implementation was a universal expectation for all high schools in the district and there was some discomfort and apprehension regarding this District mandate. There was also a new district-wide Progressive Discipline Plan that challenged and limited a school's use of out-of-school suspension. This required a shift in thinking for many of our administrators who were accustomed to the former approach to disciplinary actions.

Knowing the challenges we faced, I chose to spend the first quarter of the school year focused on building a strong open and honest relationship with each of my schools. If people needed to tell me how disenchanted they were with district leadership and the decisions that were made on their behalf, I listened. If they needed to "test" me with questions of sincerity, I answered honestly. My goal was not to change hearts and mind, it was to first build trust. Trust that I was there as a support and not as an evaluator or someone who was there to monitor on behalf of the district; trust that I wasn't there to take away their traditions or to force change on anyone.

Reflecting upon this year as a HS PBIS/MTSS coach, taking the time to understand the barriers seriously and being relentlessly persistent in helping, after trust was earned, my

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schools along their path to implementation was super important. During that first quarter “grace period”, I also learned enough about each school to meet them where they were based on their individual needs (buy-in, schedules for meetings, engaging students, willingness to try new strategies such as behavior specific praise and acknowledgment of student behavior). Each one of the nine schools I served this year has its very own personality, culture, and needs. Sure, everyone got the same foundational training on implementing PBIS, but each school needed different level and type of support. Context matters and as a coach it is important to know what challenges each school may be facing so you can customize your approach to align with that. This allows schools to approach systems change, which is hard work, in a more authentic way, one they can own. While distancing themselves from the district-wide mandate to implement. The bottom line for me is that I want each of my schools to own their work. I know that when I support their implementation and honor their unique context the likelihood that this work will sustain is much greater. What I did not want is for my schools to see the district mandate as just another box they had to check off. When implementation is driven by compliance, checking the box, then there is very little chance for authentic and sustainable implementation.

A few tips:

- Be a resource broker; find information that is high school specific and share it with teams.
- Ignore the perception that HS doesn’t want PBIS; they want what is best for students.
- Keeping a positive attitude, even when you know you’re walking into a tense situation.
- Be patient, not rushing the process, allowing schools to find their own path to implementation at the same time guiding them towards fidelity.
- Allow schools to make mistakes and model how to get past them (it’s never the end of the world), especially when the team seems to lose confidence and motivation as a result.
- Ensure that you are there as a support to help them recognize and build upon what they already have rather than trying to get rid of what is working.
- Build trusting relationships, be transparent about what you can and cannot do, and what’s going to get shared with district level supervisors.
- Be gentle but firm with tough conversations occur, reminding everyone that the common goal is what’s best for students.
- Don’t take yourself too seriously and don’t take it personal if you experience push-back.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# Stronger Together: Delivering College and Career Readiness Skills to all through a School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Framework

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### Why College and Career Readiness?

Recent federal policy initiatives require that college and career readiness (CCR) be integrated in high schools for *all* students (College and Career Readiness Standards and Assessments; <http://bit.ly/USEdCCR>) (United States Department of Education, 2010a, 2010b). The content knowledge and skills associated with CCR are foundational to achieving the Common Core State Standards (National Governor's Association, 2010). One of the priorities under the Every Student Success Act (ESSA) is funding of programs that address CCR (ESSA, 2017). Educators are faced with the daunting task of providing universal CCR for their students, while

personalizing support for each student based on interests, skills, and performance to date.

The challenge in delivering CCR skills to all students is determining and balancing the learning opportunities all high school students need to achieve, while layering additional learning opportunities for students that require more individualized supports. Schools must also consider the wide-range of strengths, needs, interests, goals, and aspirations. Fortunately, a multi-tiered system of support such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) offers an effective way to organize this continuum of support. The purpose of this chapter is to provide suggestions for modifying current

PBIS implementation efforts to explicitly teach, practice, and reinforce the CCR skill set.

### What is CCR?

Researchers agree that CCR includes multiple non-academic skills (e.g., Conley, 2010; Farrington et al., 2012). Recently, Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, and Test (2017) proposed six CCR constructs derived from a synthesis of several research-based, multidimensional models of CCR (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Lindstrom-Johnson, 2014; Conley, 2010; Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013; Farrington et al., 2012). The six CCR constructs are aligned to the “actionable categories” recently released by the College and Career Readiness and Success Center (Mishkind, 2014) and reflect the academic and behavioral skills considered foundational to being ready for success post-graduation, including (a) critical thinking, (b) academic engagement, (c) mind-sets, (d) learning processes, (e) interpersonal engagement, and (f) transition competencies.

#### *Critical Thinking*

The critical thinking construct is based on the Key Cognitive Strategies Framework (Conley, Lombardi, Seburn, & McGaughy, 2009; Lombardi, Conley, Seburn, & Downs, 2013). This framework consists of five elements that allow students to successfully navigate college and employment: problem formulation, research, interpretation, communication, and precision/accuracy. College freshman are expected to possess critical thinking skills upon arrival on campus. First-time employees are

expected to quickly master job-specific knowledge, skills, and tools that require fluency in critical thinking. A recent analysis of CCR statewide definitions shows that out of twenty one states with CCR standards, two-thirds (14) include critical thinking in a statewide definition of college and career readiness (Mishkind, 2014).

#### *Academic Engagement*

The engagement construct is parsed into two broad areas of engagement: cognitive and behavioral (Fredericks, Blumenfield, & Paris, 2004). Students use cognitive engagement skills when they link ideas and organizing concepts across content areas. Behavioral engagement is defined as students’ observable approaches to classwork, including attendance, homework completion, planning tasks, and work habits related to productivity. Researchers have established that high levels of engagement are generally associated with high levels of academic achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2005) and reduced instances of dropout (Wang & Fredricks, 2014).

#### *Mind-sets*

A strong sense of belonging with the school culture fosters persistence and can lead to the development of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008). In other words, students who feel connected to school culture will trust peers and adults in taking academic risks, and learning from mistakes; ultimately seeing value in their work while making connections to their lives (Farrington et al., 2012). Students with growth mindsets are more likely to take ownership of

learning, be self-aware, set goals, and seek help from others (Farrington et al., 2012).

### *Learning Processes*

The learning process construct includes skills such as, test-taking, note-taking, working collaboratively in groups of peers, organization, and time management (Morningstar et al., 2017). This construct emphasizes the process-oriented skills students use to access content and have been referred to as learning strategies or study skills (Deshler & Schumaker, 2006; Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011; Ruban, McCoach, McGuire, & Reis, 2003). Watt and colleagues (2008) documented that adolescents with disabilities, and first generation college students who built fluency in learning strategies during high school reported increases in their confidence to manage college coursework (Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mediola, & Alkan, 2008).

### *Interpersonal Engagement*

The interpersonal engagement construct emphasizes skills students use toward and with peers, as well as with adults in the school and the broader community (Dymnicki et al., 2013). Skills like communication, empathy, social awareness, respect for others, responsibility, and accountability for behaviors fall into this construct. Researchers have shown over time the critical role interpersonal relationship skills play in school outcomes, including motivation, engagement, and likelihood to abuse substances (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Field, Diego, & Sanders, 2002). In a recent analysis, fourteen states were found to include these important social and emotional

learning, collaboration and/or communication skills in the respective statewide definition of CCR (Mishkind, 2014).

### *Transition Competencies*

Transition competencies includes a focus on students understanding of (a) support and processes related to the transition from high school to college and careers (e.g., college and job applications, awareness of scholarships, resumes, financial aid), and (b) differences and similarities between high school and both the college social and cultural environments (e.g., faculty and peer expectations, commuting to school, dormitory living, recreation and leisure; Conley, 2010) as well as (c) differences between high school and career environments (e.g., professionalism in the workplace, interviewing, resume writing). In understanding the differences between the environment specific processes, student may gain an advanced awareness of timelines for long term goals including planning to meet application deadlines (i.e., preparing application materials, taking specific admissions exams). Building this skill set may encompass volunteering and/or interning at certain job sites, and having the opportunity to “try-out” certain jobs to better understand the fit. This construct also includes preparation for adult independent living (e.g., financial literacy, health, and wellness) and practice with self-advocacy in school and workplace settings (Morningstar et al., 2017).

### **Delivering CCR through PBIS**

Schools teams implementing PBIS to fidelity establish the systems that support effective,

team-based implementation of evidence-based practices that explicitly build the social skills necessary for academic access. In fact, many high schools may already have components of CCR imbedded within their PBIS framework and are well-positioned for the intentional alignment and integration of CCR within their established outcomes, data, practices, and systems features of the PBIS framework. The purpose of this chapter is to provide suggestions for modifying current PBIS implementation efforts to explicitly teach, practice, and reinforce the CCR skill set. These will be explored through the four elements of PBIS: Outcomes, Databased Decision-making, Practices and Systems

### Outcomes

When implementing PBIS, leadership teams begin by defining the outcomes they hope to impact. In many cases schools focus on reducing office discipline referrals (ODRs), suspensions or expulsions, or improving attendance. High school teams should consider the ways in which they can explicitly link these short-term outcomes with broader, long-term outcomes such as high school completion or college and career readiness. Making the relationship between short term academic and social behavior indicators and CCR goals explicit may garner more active involvement and support of PBIS by faculty, students, families, and community members.

In addition to ensuring this connection is apparent, teams should solicit feedback on outcomes from all stakeholders, to ensure they are meaningful and relevant to local culture, includ-

ing typically underrepresented members of the school community. For example, a high school team may define their school-wide outcomes as: *At Northeast High School, we aim to improve school completion rates to 90% for all students, including English Language Learners, and ensure 100% of students are college or career ready. In order to accomplish this goal, we will build a continuum of supports to reduce behavioral infractions for all students by 10% annually, reduce suspensions and expulsions by 30% for all students, and by 40% for students with IEPs, and reduce the number of students who are chronically absent by 50%.*

### Databased Decision-making

Leadership teams will need to use data strategically and efficiently to guide the specific practices (e.g., teaching, re-teaching, and reinforcement) to intentionally build CCR skills within their PBIS framework. Multiple sources of data will provide teams with a more complete view of student outcomes related to both academic and social functioning. Teams need to review attendance, behavior, and academic data together in order to best identify students who may be at risk and need additional supports. There are a number of early warning systems schools can use to facilitate this (e.g. AIR Early Warning Systems Implementation Guide; <http://bit.ly/AIREarlyWarning>). At a minimum, leadership teams should review early warning data before the school year starts, 20-30 days after the start of the year, and at the end of each marking period. These data timelines allow a leadership team to boost, modify, and to supplement teaching practices based on student data.

Once teams have a system in place to monitor the short-term outcomes that are predictive of on-time school completion, they will need to (a) assess baseline CCR skills school-wide and (b) use these data, in combination with their short-term outcome data to develop a plan to monitor students CCR skills directly. There are a number of validated surveys schools can choose from to assess student perceptions across some of the six CCR constructs (Table 1). School teams may select a measure, or measures, based on the needs of their students related to the valued school outcomes and or current student outcome data. Additionally, researchers have begun developing an overall measure of CCR that

reflects all six constructs (Lombardi, Freeman, & Rifenbark, 2018). In keeping with guidelines around databased decision-making for sustainability, it is recommended a school collect and share data related to their valued outcomes yearly and share the results with the stakeholders impacted by related decisions, such students and staff (McIntosh et al., 2013). Regardless of the specific measure/s chosen leadership teams will want to consider a range of both observed measures (e.g., ODR, attendance, academic performance) and student perception data (e.g., school climate, CCR survey) to look for patterns of strength and need across and within student groups.

**Table 1.** Validated Surveys to Assess Student Perception of CCR Components

Survey	MEASURES					
	Critical Thinking	Engagement	Mindsets	Learning Processes	Interpersonal Engagement	Transition Knowledge
Vocational Skills Self-Efficacy (McWhirter, Crothers, & Rasheed, 2000)						●
Key Learning Strategies and Techniques (Lombardi et al., 2011)		●		●	●	
Key Cognitive Strategies (Lombardi et al., 2013)	●					
GRIT scale (12-item) (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007)			●			
Georgia School Climate Survey ( <a href="http://bit.ly/GAclimate">http://bit.ly/GAclimate</a> , Georgia Department of Education, Salle, & Meyers, 2014)		●	●		●	
College and Career Readiness Survey (Lombardi et al., 2018)	●	●	●	●	●	●

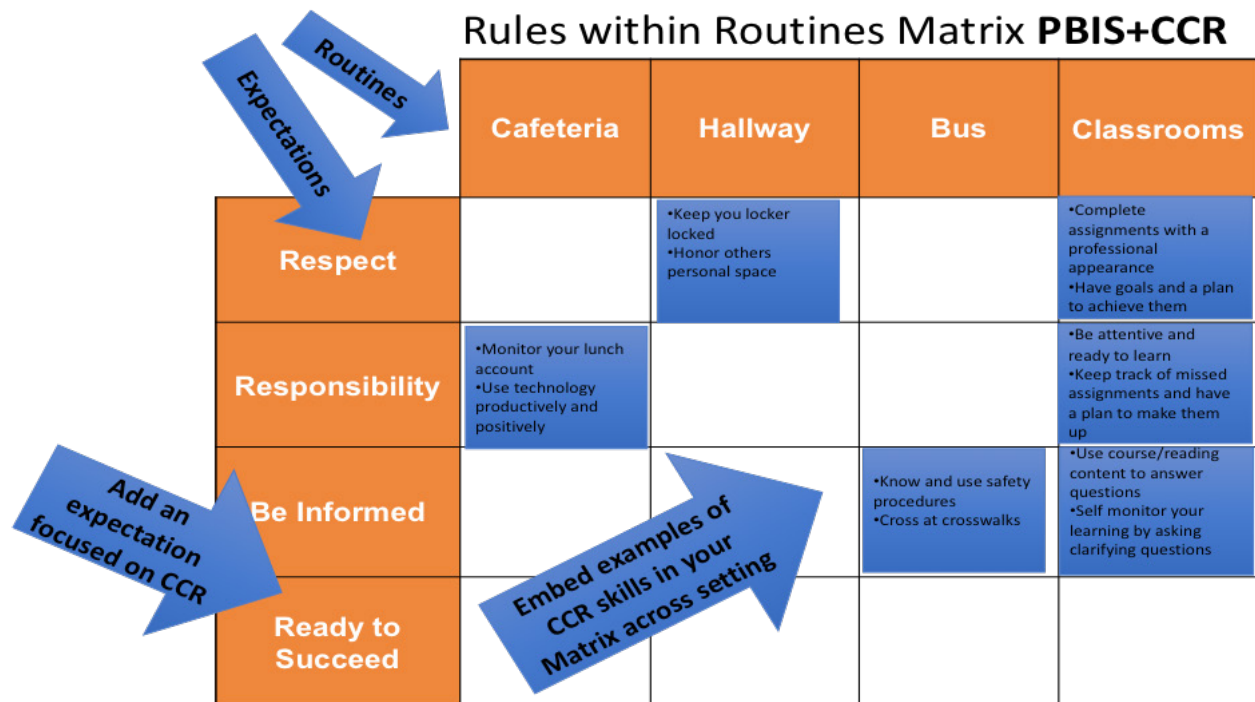
## Practices

Within the PBIS framework, practices directly support student outcomes. The two broad practices that are foundational to supporting student learning are teaching and reinforcement.

**Teaching.** Direct, frequent teaching is the mechanism for building fluency in school-wide expectations that include CCR skills. When implementing PBIS, teams define and teach 3-5 positively stated, specific school-wide expectations (e.g., respect, responsibility, safety). These expectations are defined within and across school settings (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, classroom) and exemplified through school-wide behavioral matrix that provides content and setting specific

examples of each expectation for all students and staff (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008).

Unfortunately, this process at times results in the examples of expectations that only include a set of social skills that focus on compliance, and do not explicitly emphasize the self-determination, and self-motivation that are inherent to CCR. School-wide expectations must directly promote the non-academic skills that are critical to ensuring that all students are CCR. High school leadership teams should review and modify the existing school-wide matrix, and teaching protocols, to emphasize the relationship between CCR and expectations (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Rules within Routines Matrix PBIS + CCR

The following behavioral examples were present in high school matrices and aligned with CCR constructs. These examples were generated as part of a review of matrices from 25 high schools with connections to the National Technical Assistance Center for PBIS.

**Table 2.** Examples of CRR constructs for use on Expectation Matrices

CCR Construct	Behavioral Examples		
Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete assignments</li> <li>• Create authentic work</li> <li>• Practice academic honesty</li> <li>• Find resources to help you pass every class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give and receive feedback respectfully</li> <li>• Know the resources available</li> <li>• Produce quality work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think critically, creatively, and collaboratively to overcome challenges</li> <li>• Use research materials to improve our learning</li> </ul>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively participate</li> <li>• Arrive and leave prepared</li> <li>• Attend class every day</li> <li>• Be an active listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be on time</li> <li>• Be ready to learn</li> <li>• Complete homework</li> <li>• Follow adult directions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen attentively</li> <li>• Maintain focus on the lesson</li> <li>• Participate positively</li> <li>• Stay on task</li> </ul>
Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept responsibility for your actions</li> <li>• Ask for help appropriately</li> <li>• Push yourself to achieve your best</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend school activities and events</li> <li>• Be a good citizen</li> <li>• Challenge yourself to do your best</li> <li>• Foster school spirit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give your best effort</li> <li>• Join extracurricular activities</li> <li>• Put effort into your work</li> <li>• Talk to teachers about improving your grade</li> </ul>
Learning Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check grades weekly</li> <li>• Check your assignment notebook to make sure you have your materials to do your homework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperate with others</li> <li>• Develop good study habits</li> <li>• Follow guidelines in student planner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize</li> <li>• Use time productively</li> <li>• Use your planner</li> <li>• Carry planner at all times</li> </ul>
Interpersonal Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be courteous</li> <li>• Display affection appropriately</li> <li>• Honor others' personal space</li> <li>• Handle conflict appropriately</li> <li>• Keep hands and feet to yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play safely</li> <li>• Respect the privacy of others</li> <li>• Support each other</li> <li>• Treat each other kindly</li> <li>• Use appropriate language (with peers, staff)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use manners</li> <li>• Use a conversational tone</li> <li>• Value diversity</li> <li>• Wait your turn</li> </ul>
Transition Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean up after yourself</li> <li>• Dress appropriately for all activities</li> <li>• Drive safely</li> <li>• Increase knowledge and use of community resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain personal hygiene</li> <li>• Make healthy food choices</li> <li>• Monitor your lunch account</li> <li>• Plan for the future</li> <li>• Protect personal information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report safety concerns to staff</li> <li>• Take care of school property</li> <li>• Use cell phone before and after school</li> <li>• Use computers for academic purposes</li> </ul>

These examples can provide a starting place to review, and modify a high school's current matrix for the presence of CCR constructs. It is important to ensure all six constructs are represented, and that lesson plans and practices activities for the six CCR constructs are delivered in multiple content areas and settings so that all

students will be provided with opportunities to generalize their use of CCR skills to multiple classes and settings. Teams can use the self-assessment in Table 3 to audit their existing matrix and lesson plan documents to ensure all non-academic CCR constructs are included.

**Table 3.** Matrix Self-Assessment for CCR constructs

CCR Construct	Key Concepts	Matrix Score (0, 1, 2)	Lessons Score (0, 1, 2)	Action items
Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• problem formulation</li> <li>• research</li> <li>• interpretation</li> <li>• communication</li> <li>• precision/accuracy</li> </ul>			
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cognitive</li> <li>• behavioral</li> </ul>			
Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sense of belonging</li> <li>• persistence</li> </ul>			
Learning Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• test-taking</li> <li>• note-taking</li> <li>• working collaboratively</li> <li>• organization</li> <li>• time management</li> </ul>			
Interpersonal Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication</li> <li>• empathy</li> <li>• social awareness</li> <li>• respect for others</li> <li>• responsibility</li> <li>• accountability</li> </ul>			
Transition Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition resources</li> <li>• difference between high school, college, and career environments</li> </ul>			

*0=not present, 1=partially present, 2=clearly present*

**Reinforcement.** Leadership teams can promote fluency and generalization of new CCR skills in students by intentionally reinforcing students' use of key CCR skills across settings and content areas periodically throughout the year. External reinforcement is most critical when students are first acquiring a new skill and are not yet fluent enough to access more naturally occurring reinforcement (e.g., grades, peer approval). It is most efficient to use the reinforcement system that the PBIS team has already established to acknowledge the other school-wide expectations. Teams may use the school-wide recognition system to target a skill of the week or month (e.g., time management or study skills leading up to exams), or grade levels may choose to target a specific CCR skill that is aligned with their curriculum (e.g., collaboration or professional communication) across subject areas.

Reinforcement is a crucial practice for fluency building across curricula, and yet a seemingly difficult practice for high schools to put robustly place. In examining the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET) scores for 996 high schools, Swain-Bradway, Freeman, Nese, and Kittelman (2018) found that even high schools meeting SET fidelity for Tier 1 implementation, the average score for the Recognition Subscale fell in the bottom third in relation to other subscale averages.

### *Systems*

Finally, schools looking to deliver CCR through the PBIS framework must consider the systems that will enable staff to actively teach, provide practice opportunities, and reinforce

CCR skills. Specifically, schools should provide targeted professional development to support educators involved in the delivery of CCR through classroom strategies. These activities may be directed toward enhancing core content knowledge (e.g., knowledge of the six CCR constructs) or pedagogical knowledge for teaching CCR skills to academically diverse groups of students. Leadership teams may also need training or support to increase their fluency in using data to continue to strengthen CCR integration into the PBIS framework.

In addition, school teams should evaluate the overall PBIS systems with the goal to improve efficiency with respect to delivering CCR skills school-wide. Using data on fidelity of implementation of PBIS, from the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), teams can identify areas of strength and need, related to overall implementation that may impact delivery of CCR instruction. To support long term sustainability of CCR within their PBIS implementation teams may consider redefining roles, or allocating time for staff with expertise in the core components of PBIS including assessment (school psychologists, special educators), specialized instruction (reading specialists, special educators, SLPs,) and collaboration (administrators, school psychologists, school counselors) to support the integration of CCR skills into the PBIS framework. This effort is important for increasing the organizational and implementation efficiency of the integrated PBIS+ CCR model.

As an example, one high school leadership team used 15 minutes of their monthly faculty meeting to review one CCR construct. The fac-

ulty then took five minutes to collectively brainstorm how they could teach and integrate that concept in their courses that month, and how they would use the school-wide recognition system to reinforce those skills. This leadership team provided explicit support for the successful integration of CCR within PBIS through this brief, professional development format.

### Conclusion

The preparation of students for college and careers is clearly a priority in U.S. public education. There is support, and evidence, for a clearly articulated set of constructs that incor-

porate both the academic and non-academic aspects of CCR. Unfortunately, educators, especially in high schools, receive little guidance in teaching CCR skills in meaningful and productive ways. In this chapter, we proposed directly teaching and reinforcing CCR skills via PBIS to ensure adoption and implementation meet fidelity benchmarks, are efficient, relevant, and sustainable. Delivering CCR through the multi-tiered PBIS framework ensures that embedded instruction on CCR is available for all students and across all content areas and settings, providing a strong foundation for building a continuum of increasingly intensive CCR supports for students.

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## CHAPTER SIX

# Investing in Freshmen: Providing Preventive Support to 9th Graders

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Sun Suetern THURSTON HIGH SCHOOL

### Setting the Stage: Why Freshmen?

Freshmen year has been identified as one of the most important years in high school. Research has shown that freshman year, more than any other, determines whether a student will move on or drop out. The act of dropping out of school has major personal and economic impacts for high school students and for society as a whole. Data from the U.S. Department of Labor reflected an average joblessness rate in June of 2014 of 8.2% for young high school dropouts, compared to 5.6% for high school graduates (Bureau of Labor Statistics; <http://bit.ly/BLSDropOut>). Ultimately, over their working lives, “the average high school dropout will cost taxpayers over \$292,000 in lower tax revenues, higher cash and in-kind transfer costs, and imposed incarceration costs”, while the average high school graduate will make a positive lifetime net fiscal contribution of \$287,000 (Sum et al., 2009; 2011; <http://bit.ly/PBISCosts>).

When PBIS Leadership teams disaggregate their data, they often find that freshmen students have the most Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs), most failing grades, and attendance rates that drop dramatically in the second half of 9th grade, and continue to deteriorate for those students who end 9th grade with poor attendance patterns. In fact, more students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Fortunately, School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions

More students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out. (Allensworth & Easton, 2005)

and Supports (PBIS) offers schools a way to address these 9th grade challenges. In our work implementing PBIS in over 3400 high schools, we have learned that the PBIS framework integrating data, systems and practices (Sugai, et al., 2017) can be emphasized at the 9th grade level and that there are some key practices that are particularly relevant for improving this critical 9th grade year for all students.

### Emphasize PBIS in the 9th Grade

Schoolwide PBIS is centered on the concept that strong preventive efforts at the universal level will result in a reduction in the number of students needing more intensive support (Lewis, T.J., et al, 2017; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007). This logic extends to investing in elevated support for all freshmen. Building effective prevention-focused systems and practices that are aimed at all freshmen will equip students with the basic skills to be more successful in their school setting, and will reduce the level of need as students progress through high school.

The first step in ensuring strong preventive support for 9th graders is to increase consistent implementation of schoolwide supports at the freshmen level. The goal of PBIS is to provide a consistent, predictable, positive, and safe environment so that students can focus on learning and participate successfully in school. In high schools, students typically have many different teachers each day, navigate confusing bell schedules, and juggle varying social interactions with teachers and peers. Ensuring that students entering high school are provided an experience that

Ensuring that students entering high school are provided an experience that is as consistent and predictable as possible will increase the likelihood that they will learn to navigate their new environment more quickly and effectively.

is as consistent and predictable as possible will increase the likelihood that they will learn to navigate their new environment more quickly and effectively. In this way, it is especially important that teachers of freshmen understand and utilize the key PBIS systems and practices developed through the building PBIS Leadership Team. In a sense, this is a scaffolding of PBIS supports, with the highest level of structure being provided to the youngest, newest students in the building. Upperclassmen will require less structure and can even be utilized in creative ways to support the 9th graders themselves. Within the PBIS framework, there are three key areas that make up this increased structure recommended for 9th grade students: increased teaching of schoolwide expectations, increased level of acknowledgement, and increased consistency of classroom systems.

### *Increase Teaching*

The first key way in which freshmen can be provided with an especially supportive universal level of PBIS is by increasing the frequency of teaching of the schoolwide expectations. Data

in most high schools indicate that 9th graders have the highest rates of problem behavior. By investing time and effort in these newer, younger students through increased teaching of expectations, more problem behaviors can be prevented. Schoolwide expectations can be taught early in the school year, but boosters are also done more frequently with freshmen than with students in the upper grades. Ninth grade data often points to behaviors that freshmen are struggling with more than their older peers, so additional boosters can be developed and delivered to address such 9th grade needs. For example, the schoolwide expectations may be taught or reviewed at the beginning of the year and after the winter break to all students. It would be beneficial to teach them to 9th graders at least twice during the first quarter, then once per quarter after that. Boosters still need to occur as data (high levels of tardy or disrespect) or special events (homecoming, finals, etc.) in the school year indicate. Many schools have also added academic and academic support skills to the content that is taught to freshmen. In addition to learning about the schoolwide expectations, for example, they participate in lessons that build the self-management skills students need to be successful, such as showing up on time, keeping track of work, what resources are available in the school, or how to understand academic credits and the high school transcript. This is discussed in further detail below.

### *Increase Acknowledgements*

Another way to address the 9th grade need is to increase the rate of acknowledging students for exhibiting behaviors that demonstrate the schoolwide expectations. Increasing the rates of acknowledgement will help students recognize the types of behavior that are expected, and will encourage them to keep up the desired behaviors. The delivery of an acknowledgement is also an opportunity to remind other students of the schoolwide expectations by seeing others be acknowledged. Utilizing the schoolwide acknowledgement system and simply ensuring that there is an increased rate of delivery to 9th graders is the simplest way to accomplish this. Utilize your schoolwide data systems that track acknowledgements to verify whether 9th graders are being acknowledged more than students in upper grades. In the Schoolwide leadership team, review data around rates of delivery of acknowledgements to ensure 9th graders are receiving high numbers of them. You might also implement additional 9th grade celebrations tied to specific goals (reduction in tardies over a one month period) or times of year (mid-term exams). For example, one school had a specific goal to reduce tardies in the 9th grade, so they did a specific lesson around on-time behavior, they clarified and consistently enforced the consequence system related to tardy behavior, and they increased the use of acknowledgements for on time behavior. This school saw a 40% reduc-

tion in the rate of tardy behaviors in 9th graders across a 6 week period.

### *Increase Consistency of PBIS Classroom Systems*

The third way to utilize existing PBIS systems to better support 9th graders to emphasize the elements of effective classroom management (see PBIS in Classroom; <http://bit.ly/PBISClassroom>). Classroom systems within PBIS include practices such as greeting students by name as they enter the room, using pre-corrections at the start of class, maintaining a ratio of 4 positive: 1 corrective feedback, maintaining clear and consistent classroom expectations, utilizing attention-getting signals and having established routines for classroom activities (transitions, group work, pair work, late assignments, etc.). In essence, these are the telltale signs of good classroom management and strong teaching. Working with faculty and staff who teach the majority of freshmen to ensure that there is commitment and consensus to establish and maintain these practices at a high level is an important element in providing universal, preventive support to all 9th graders. Building this level of “buy in” around consistency is a process that requires time and communication. All teachers will not completely agree, but begin with those who will and build momentum over time. By providing this basic, across-the-board level of clarity, the guesswork is eliminated and students are able to begin their high school experience with structure and stability. Then, as students demonstrate proficiency with classroom expectations, structure can be slowly removed to

increase independence and prepare them for the upper grades. While these strategies are important and effective in building a strong schoolwide climate across all grades, building stronger stability across the 9th grade will support all students entering high school and will assist them in establishing positive social and academic behaviors. For example, to enhance 9th grade consistency, teachers may agree to have an umbrella policy around late work that is taught to students as “during the first semester, late work will be accepted for partial credit” or “during the first semester, late work will be accepted for partial credit up to 1 week late.” Teachers can still set their own rules around how much credit (10% reduction, 50% reduction, etc.) but each teacher’s individual policy will fit beneath the broader umbrella phrase around “partial credit”. Then, as students learn the expectations and build fluency, the support is faded (i.e. at second semester) in order to increase independence, so teachers have the option to adjust their individual policies at that time and this is explicitly taught and discussed with students so they are aware of any changes.

### **Develop Additional 9th Grade Practices**

Once you have strengthened and amplified PBIS for the 9th grade, your team may consider the implementation of additional practices. In our experience, three are particularly worth noting: developing freshmen-specific leadership and data based decision making systems, identifying and teaching a specific set of needed knowledge and skills for 9th graders, and utiliz-

ing upperclassmen to support 9th graders. Some schools have selected one to focus on, while others have combined two or even all three to create a strong system of freshmen supports. Your team will need to consider the context of your building and what will fit best with other efforts being implemented in your building. We advise that if you are just starting out, focus first on installing a freshmen leadership and data based decision making systems, then build from these based on the needs in your building. Before implementing additional efforts at the 9th grade level, the PBIS Leadership Team and the Administrative Team will need to share information (e.g. why important, impact on outcomes, school data) with all faculty and staff in order for them to buy-in to the special attention on freshmen and assist with establishment of a common vision and consistent use of practices.

### *Install 9th Grade Leadership and Data Based Decision Making Systems*

A key system in the PBIS framework is the use of leadership teams. These teams monitor the implementation and fidelity of PBIS systems and practices as well as outcomes for students. Fully implementing PBIS schools have a universal team as well as one or more advanced tier teams (Tier 2 and Tier 3). The universal team is focused on implementation of the systems, practices and data for all students. For your freshmen work, it is recommended that you set up a targeted leadership group that is exclusively focused on universal freshmen supports. This will allow the school to develop strategies to address specific challenges for freshmen such as attendance,

course failure or inappropriate behaviors, and can monitor the implementation of specific 9th grade practices (teaching selected content, providing peer support, etc.) without taking time away from the overall schoolwide efforts. It is important to have overlapping membership on both of these teams (schoolwide PBIS team and freshmen-specific team) so that they are working in conjunction with one another.

Similar to your PBIS Leadership Team, this **Freshmen Leadership Team** will need to hold meetings regularly. Meetings should have a standard agenda and be driven by outcome and fidelity data. Teams need to identify action steps, who is responsible and monitor progress for each of the items identified. Keep the group manageable to ensure ease of scheduling and then reach out for input and support as needed. We recommend keeping the group at 5-7 people, including teachers & staff who work with freshmen (counselor, Dean of Students, attendance committee representative, etc.), one administrator and at least one of the individuals serving on the Schoolwide Leadership Team to ensure communication. As noted previously, since both the PBIS Leadership Team and the Freshmen Leadership Team will be planning activities and distributing communications with administrators, students, teachers and other staff, and families, it will be important to coordinate, communicate and work together so as to not overwhelm these stakeholders. The Freshmen Leadership Team will also periodically need to provide relevant information to all faculty so that, when appropriate, they can be involved in and informed about implementation.

The driver for the activities of the Freshmen Leadership Team is the use of **data based decision making**. We recommend high schools examine three primary areas of student outcome data, often referred to as the ABCs: Attendance, Behavior and Course Performance. It should also be noted that we recommend that these data areas be monitored across all grades by the PBIS Leadership Team, and that the information here can apply to any grade level. We will discuss them within the context of this chapter as they relate to freshmen because, as identified in the chapter introduction and overview, 9th grade is a particularly critical year where many students can fall behind in these areas.

We recommend high schools examine three primary areas of student outcome data, often referred to as the ABCs: Attendance, Behavior and Course Performance.

It is helpful for the team to set specific goals, or annual benchmarks, for the 9th grade in each of these areas (attendance, behavior, course performance). When setting goals, the team will need to determine the current status and set goals accordingly. For example, one school set a goal that 90% of their 9th graders would have no Fs, but that year they obtained 79%. The goal of 90% sounded good to the team, but they had not analyzed the data prior to setting the goal. The following year they adjusted and set a goal of 83%. While the goal was lower, it

was more attainable and the team had more success in building momentum as the students progressed toward it.

The establishment of a common language around the data goals will help teachers and others communicate quickly and remind students and families of the relevance of the school goals. Schools have ended up coining some phrases that align with their on track benchmark goals, such as “fewer than 5, pass 6, maintain 2.5” for school goals related to absences, credit accrual, and GPA. One school placed a flyer in faculty and staff mailboxes quarterly containing both text and data graphics that displayed progress toward student benchmarks. Once goals are set and language around them developed and taught to staff and students, these data must be monitored throughout the year for decision making and progress monitoring.

**Attendance** data is frequently summarized in an overall percentage. A more accurate way to view attendance data is to look at the percentage of students who are meeting an identified attendance rate goal. One school, for example, set an attendance rate goal of 90% for all students, in accordance with research that indicates that students who miss more than 10% of students are considered to be at risk of dropout (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Rather than calculate an average across all students, or even all students by grade level, this school learned that calculating the percentage of 9th graders who were meeting this goal was a more accurate depiction student attendance, and it also helped them quickly identify students in need of additional supports.

**Behavior** data in high schools typically points to attendance related behaviors (skip and tardy), so we recommend Freshmen Leadership Teams pay special attention to this data each month, as well. Monitoring these data will allow the team to identify issues and design interventions to address them. As with other behavior data monitoring, it is important to summarize rates instead of looking at a number of events, and to disaggregate the behavior data by key variables such as time of day.

**Course performance** is the third data element for teams to use. This might include course passing rates, credit accrual, GPA, or other metrics. Choose the best single variable that aligns with your school's context and culture. Due to varied online grading systems and agreements around when grades are updated, it is important to come up with a schedule for your school that provides the team with accurate, updated data. In other words, looking at course performance data monthly only makes sense if all teachers in the 9th grade update their grades each month before the data is pulled for analysis. One school attempted to use this data monthly, but decided to only do it quarterly because grade data was not accurate enough on a monthly basis to be useful. Some schools use additional data such as an assessment of freshmen student learning on the identified set of engagement-related knowledge and skills taught to freshmen (see below) or an overall climate survey for the school. Finally, to maintain communication and buy-in to the work, it is important that progress toward all data goal areas be shared throughout the year with faculty, staff, students and families.

### *Identify and Teach Specific Knowledge and Skills Needed for Success*

A second practice to consider for universal 9th grade support is built on what we know to be effective in PBIS: explicitly teaching expected behaviors. In keeping with this, a central feature to meaningful support for 9th graders is to identify and teach explicitly the knowledge and skills we want 9th graders to have. These must align with broader school goals and be designed to prevent the most common areas of difficulty for students. Many schools refer to this content simply as “**how to do school**” (See chapter 5). The Freshmen Leadership Team needs to identify a set of knowledge and skills for their building, and undergo a process of vetting these with staff, students (upperclassmen), and families as the content is clarified and finalized. Some schools have found it helpful to survey upperclassmen and 10th grade teachers to gather input on what's most important for freshmen to know. Schools will want to consider a variety of skill areas, but be sure to pay special attention to the areas of getting work done (e.g., using planner, study plans, prioritizing), getting to graduation (on-track, reading transcripts), getting connected (e.g., productive coping, getting involved, teacher allies). In identifying content to teach to all 9th graders, it is easy for the list of needs to become very long. It is helpful for teams to think about what information or skills will have the most far-reaching impact. In other words, ask “What is the smallest change that will yield the biggest impact?”. It is not likely that we can devote a great deal of instructional time

to these topics, so it is critical to identify which are the most essential. We encourage teams to consider content that will support students academically and socially, and that is focused on building self-advocacy skills so that students can develop into self-directed learners. Table 1 identifies a sample set of recommended topics for teams to consider.

**Table 1.** Sample knowledge and skills taught to 9th graders

“How to Do School” Knowledge and Skills	
	Credit requirements
	How to know when help is needed & where to get it
	How to read a transcript
	Productive coping strategies for stress
	Study strategies
	Using a planner
	Effective prioritization
	Communicating with teachers effectively

Once topics have been identified, the Team will need to **consider how and when to deliver the content**. It is important to assess available time, format and setting for teaching to take place as this will drive the lesson format and how many lessons can be delivered. We recommend that lessons be front-loaded and taught early in the school year (i.e. first 6-8 weeks) so that content is taught as part of “setting the stage” of

high school. It is often helpful to utilize freshmen orientation if you have one, but not to limit delivery of this content only to orientation. To find class time, consider utilizing time from classes that are required for freshmen and distribute teaching opportunities equally across these classes (i.e. 25 minutes in Health in weeks 1 and 3, 25 minutes in English 9 in weeks 2 and 4, advisory). For example, one school implemented their freshmen lessons in English class by placing short duration lessons and activities at the beginning of class for the first 6 weeks of the year. Once they had identified a time slot, they could focus in on their top priority content to be delivered during that time. You may need to revise and prioritize your list of topics to match the time available. As for how to deliver this type of “how to do school” content, there are plenty of resources online, or starting with some activities from a specific curriculum is also a good way to start. Some schools have had staff members who were excited to develop their own small set of lessons and interactive activities. Once delivered, this content can be periodically revisited in multiple classes and settings to ensure generalization and application to the whole school environment. Another school already had advisory periods so delivered their lessons and activities in that setting. It provided more time and allowed them to do additional planning and support work with 9th graders, in addition to the lessons around key knowledge and skills. A third school delivered the content in short weekly assemblies for the first 6 weeks of school. Whatever setting you choose, it is important to be sure the teachers are in full sup-

port, and that the time is well-utilized once it is set aside. The effort is sure to fall flat if students, staff, and families do not see it as a valuable use of time. In this way, the messaging and communication around this effort to teachers, families and students is critical.

The content taught to 9th graders will have more staying power if it has key language that is also used throughout the student's day in other classes and settings. Similar to PBIS, these areas of content and the language identified with them can serve as a platform on which to **build a common language and culture for the 9th grade**. The key with the lessons and the language associated with them is to have digestible take home messages that build a common language for the school around 9th grade knowledge and skills. As with designing and teaching lessons around the schoolwide expectations, it is important to take the time to provide sufficient support to help ensure a high level of fidelity among whoever is delivering the content. To achieve consistency, it is critical to build buy in, to provide sufficient training and ongoing support, and to provide opportunities for teachers to interact with the content and to practice delivery before they are expected to do so in the actual setting. Also, as part of the delivery, it is helpful to observe those delivering the content, while also giving them the opportunity to provide feedback on potential improvements or adjustments as you move forward. Finally, ensure some form of fidelity check that looks at both quantity (*Did you cover all the key parts of the lesson?*) and quality (*Did you deliver the lesson well?*).

### Utilize Upperclassmen

The third practice we recommend for consideration is the utilization of upperclassmen in providing a universal level of support to 9th graders. Research has shown that a positive relationship with older peers can enhance school engagement for freshmen (Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005). High school students are striving for autonomy, especially from adult influence, and ninth graders look up to their 11th and 12th grade peers. Successful upperclassmen have already figured how to navigate the high school environment, learned how to effectively use school resources, and generally have great information and successful strategies to share with freshmen. In keeping with language presented earlier, these upperclassmen serve as “how to do school” coaches. It is important to note that we are not describing a mentor relationship. A mentor is a close, 1:1 relationship between mentor and mentee. While there are

Successful upperclassmen have already figured how to navigate the high school environment, learned how to effectively use school resources, and generally have great information and successful strategies to share with freshmen. In keeping with language presented earlier, these upperclassmen serve as “**how to do school**” coaches.

clear benefits to the use of mentors, using older peers in this manner brings with it a variety of risks and logistical constraints (inappropriate interactions, deviance training, confidentiality, reporting requirements, etc.) that we have found require a lot of resources. Taking a more universal approach requires fewer resources, provides for safer, more structured interactions between groups of students, and still provides substantial benefits for everyone involved. For the purposes of this chapter, we will use the term “peer coach” to describe these upperclassmen, and we encourage you to come up with your own title to match your school context. If your school decides to use a “peer coaching” practice, it will require coordination for selection and recruitment; organizing and delivering trainings; providing support; troubleshooting problems; and overall communication. Consider identifying a staff person to coordinate this effort and act as the primary contact for students, teachers, and staff. To help guide you in considering the use of peer coaches, we will outline three key areas of implementation: developing roles and responsibilities, recruitment and training, and providing ongoing support.

The first step in implementing peer coaches is to **develop roles and responsibilities** for them. As noted previously, the general role of the peer coach is to help 9th graders understand “how to do school”. Each school will vary in their priorities and in the specific types of activities that the peer coach is responsible for. Generally, the peer coach role can be divided into those that occur outside the classroom setting, and those that occur inside the classroom setting.

Whatever the setting, it is critical that the peer coaches be set up for success with a strong and intentional introduction to the 9th grade students, including an orientation about the peer coach role and an opportunity for peer coaches to share information about themselves with the freshmen. Providing an introduction, and even some opportunities for ice breaker activities, between 9th graders and the peer coaches will help set the stage for this new coaching role.

There are a wide variety of ways for peer coaches to interact with 9th graders *outside the classroom setting*. Many schools utilize upperclassmen in their freshmen orientation activities. They can lead tours, facilitate discussion groups, play introductory games or lead activities designed to familiarize the incoming 9th graders with the school climate, culture, and expectations. As noted above, teachers need to introduce the peer coaches and clearly state their role. Create ways for them to tell a bit about themselves, their interests, and their school story to the 9th graders, and make them easily identifiable with a common t-shirt or other visual cue. It is important to keep this type of momentum going past the start of year by planning other positive, interactive activities. If your peer coaches have t-shirts or other identifiers, have them wear those every day for the first week of school, or every Friday for the first few months of school. This is a very low impact way they can be easily identified to help 9th graders open their lockers, find classes, get to know the school building, and help freshmen feel welcome and supported in their new school environment. Plan and calendar other activities at least quar-

terly, timed with key events in the school calendar. These may include having the peer coaches hand out cookies to 9th graders at lunch after mid-terms, or putting positive post it note messages on all freshmen lockers at a key time of year. Events like these increase the visibility of the peer coaches and allow them to be seen as approachable, positive social role models in the school for all freshmen.

Other roles and responsibilities of the peer coach can occur *within the classroom setting*. If you have schoolwide expectations developed or have identified other “how to do school” content to deliver to 9th graders, older peers can support the teaching of these knowledge and skills by co-teaching lessons or facilitating activities when appropriate. In the classroom setting, peer coaches can also add their own experiences and examples to lessons and content. Because they are close in age and likely had some of the same teachers, they offer a unique perspective that the teacher doesn’t have. One high school decided to teach all freshmen effective communication strategies with teachers, and had the upperclassmen deliver the lesson. Another high school wanted to teach all ninth graders the importance of being on track to graduation and how credits work. There were two peer coaches in the class, and through the sharing of personal stories like how one student failed a class and had to retake it in 10th grade, ninth graders’ eyes were opened to the world of high school credit accrual and the importance of earning credits toward graduation in a powerful and effective way. As these examples illustrate, these messages for 9th graders can have more meaning coming from older

peers than from an adult. The telling of personal experiences goes a long way to foster relationships between the upperclassmen and freshmen students. Peer coaches can also provide academic support in classes. This can be done with individual students or small groups who are struggling with a specific content area. High school teachers serve a large number of students; by utilizing upperclassmen to assist with homework, class assignments, and test prep, more students are able to get the help they need.

With clear roles and responsibilities identified, it is important to carefully plan for **recruitment and selection** of the peer coaches. Schools will need to be strategic about selecting the right students to serve in this leadership role. We recommend a complete application and selection process that includes at least one teacher recommendation as a requirement. Also consider grade and GPA minimums, but be careful not to set them too high. Students who have struggled themselves and have worked hard to overcome those challenges can have a great deal of lessons learned to impart to younger students. Many high schools have various leadership groups already in place, and can tap into those groups to generate interest. A major goal of installing peer coaches is for freshmen to identify with the older peers and see them as supportive and accessible, so be sure to recruit a diverse group of upperclassmen representative of the school’s population.

**Training** peer coaches for their new role is an essential activity when utilizing upperclassmen in these roles. This training must include introducing them to rules about confidentiality,

what behaviors or information should be immediately reported to an adult, and expectations for handling students who are uncooperative or disrespectful. Consider the use of scenarios and role play in the training which give peer coaches the opportunity to think about possible situations and discuss solutions with a partner. In schools where peer coaches have been placed in classroom settings, it has proven essential to involve the teachers and peer coaches in training together, which allows them time to talk about expectations, and identify common language and strategies for working well together in the classroom. When it comes to placing peer coaches, consider matching the upperclassmen with teachers they already connect with or ask them who they'd like to work with. They typically have relationships with teachers they have had previously, and this can facilitate a stronger classroom presence and facilitate better connections with the 9th graders.

Finally, it is important to plan for the **ongoing support** of peer coaches. We recommend that a school dedicate a coordinator who is responsible for organization, support, troubleshooting, and overall communication. Provide regular opportunities for the peer coaches to connect with each other and the coordinator. For example, host a monthly lunch meeting for the peer coaches, facilitated by the coordinator. Other schools have run such peer supports through a peer leadership course, in which the upperclassmen are enrolled and earning credit, learning related skills, and receiving ongoing support in their roles as peer leaders. In addition to offering social connections, this time

can be used to reteach skills or content related to their role, troubleshoot issues, celebrate successes, and gather their perspective on the experience to make improvements or adjustments in the overall peer coach implementation. One of the most frequently encountered challenges that peer coaches have identified in schools doing this work is that freshmen can be slow to connect with peer coaches. Strategies to facilitate an earlier connection between 9th graders and their peer coaches include a) take time to provide clear introductions and conduct multiple ice breaker activities early in the year, b) include multiple fun “social role model” activities, c) place multiple peer coaches per group of 9th graders to increase the diversity of perspectives and ensure good representation across different interests and subgroups. A second challenge cited by some schools is maintaining ongoing communication between the coordinator and the peer coaches. A number of schools have addressed this through the use of electronic forms of communication like auto-text alerts or google classroom to deliver messages about things such as lesson plan content, reminders for positive social events, and tips to keep in mind when helping students.

### **Case Example: Thurston High School, Springfield, Oregon**

Thurston High School (THS) has an enrollment of 1,267 students with 329 freshmen. It is located in the mid-Willamette Valley of Oregon. The student population is approximately 684/583 males/females, 74% identify themselves as Caucasian, 14% identify as

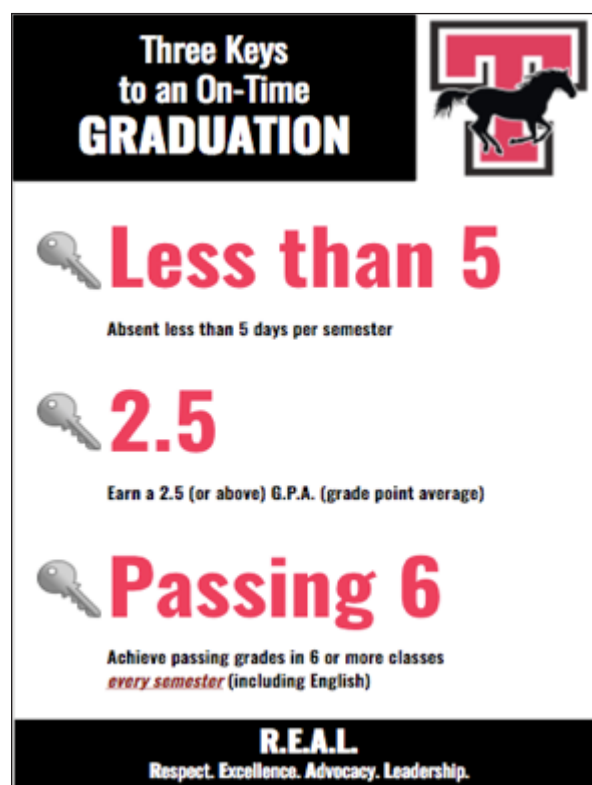
Hispanic and 2% identify as Asian, American Indian, Alaskan or African American and 10% identify as other or 2 or more races/ethnicities. Thirty-seven percent of the student population qualify for free and reduced lunch. Thurston High School employs 71 certified staff members and 43 support staff members; the student to teacher ratio is 23:1.

THS utilizes a freshmen teaming model, which divides their freshmen into 3 cohort groups. The school also enrolls every freshmen into a Freshmen Learning Teams class. Each cohort has the same set of teachers for English, Science and their Freshmen Learning Teams (FLT) class. This allows for the students to be in class with familiar students and teachers to be able to more closely watch student progress. In the Freshmen Learning Teams class, teachers are able to teach common skills (e.g., 15 min silent read, annotated vocabulary, school-wide expectations) important to freshmen success. This is discussed in more detail below. During 2016-2017 the school worked to implement all the three practices mentioned in this chapter: Freshmen Leadership Team, Teaching of Expectations, Use of Peer Coaches.

### *Freshmen Leadership Team*

An Assistant Principal and a teacher from each of the cohort teams had previously met each month to talk about logistics and planning for Freshmen Learning Teams (FLT) (i.e. what lessons they would teach or activities planned). During 2016-2017 this group became a formal Freshmen Leadership Team whose defined purpose was to review and respond to freshmen

data and implement specific practices, including teaching of expectations and using peer coaches. This team also learned skills related to effective meeting practices and communicating consistently with others in the school.



**Figure 1.** Sample of school communication around data goals

The Freshmen Leadership Team focus on data for decision making was assisted through the use of a process to establish a school goal for each of the three data areas: attendance, behavior, course performance. Their goals for that year were: 80% on-track (6+ credits), 80% regular attenders (90% Average Daily Attendance), and average GPA of 2.5. The team developed messaging and formal and informal signage (see Figure 1) to support the messages. In the Freshmen

Learning Teams class, teachers committed to explicitly teaching the students about these goals, and integrating the language throughout their interactions with 9th grade students. The team also developed competitions and acknowledgment events related to these. Examples include Honor Roll Desserts, no missing assignment parties, 90% attendance celebrations, etc. The students became very familiar with the three goals (similar to the 3-5 PBIS school wide expectations set by the school Leadership Team in PBIS implementation), and in this way they became embedded into the culture of the 9th grade.

### *Teaching of Expectations*

All 9th graders were enrolled in the Freshmen Learning Teams class. This was an elective credit course met for 90 minutes 2-3 days a week (A/B block schedule). The courses were taught by the teachers who taught content to the freshmen cohorts (e.g., English, math). The first 45 minutes was instructional time and the last 45 was student support time. Since they were in cohorts and all students in the cohort had this class at the same time, students could sign out of their Freshmen Learning Teams course to talk to one of their other teachers, or teachers arrange a conference with the student during the student support time. Prior to the 2016-17 school year, the content taught during the first half of Freshmen Learning Teams included transcript audits, prioritization, decision-making, goal setting, etc. During the 2016-2017 school year, the school had access to 12 additional lessons that focused on “how to do school”, as described above. Some of the new lessons included school-

wide expectations, how to access teachers, grades checks, etc. The Freshmen Leadership Team spent time developing a scope and sequence for the Freshmen Learning Teams class that included these new lessons. A few lead teachers also developed Google Slides presentations that could be accessed by all teachers to support consistency in delivery of this content.

### *Using Peer Coaches*

The school had a standard teaching assistant program, where students could apply to be a teaching assistant. Their tasks included copying materials for a teacher, setting up a lab, tutoring in the tutoring center, etc. The school used this infrastructure to receive applications from the upperclassmen but also did direct recruiting. The assistant principal recruited students he thought would be a good fit for the new peer coach role due to their leadership, follow through and/or their ability to “turn around” their high school experience. The assistant principal also ensured that all groups were represented in the pool of recruited peer coaches. Teachers also recommended students whom they would like to have a peer coaches and encouraged the student to apply. Freshmen Learning Teams class was assigned 1-2 peer coaches. The peer coaches would assist the teacher during the lesson time and then during student support time would circulate among the 9th graders offering support or supporting specific students identified by the teacher. Though occasionally they might assist with academic support, in many instances they also talked with students about ‘how to do school’ and supporting skills needed to ‘do

school' such as staying organized, communicating with teachers, following up on tasks, or using a planner. For example they might a) help a student get into the school grading system to identify missing assignments and develop a plan to get them accomplished, b) help decipher a confusing or challenging assignment that they received, or c) nudge students to stay on top of studying when a big test was coming up.

After implementing these components, Thurston High School has seen positive impacts on their freshmen students. Students performed well on end of year assessments in the FLT class, and the attendance and freshmen on track metrics improved. The school continues to implement these practices.

### Summary and Recommendations

It is widely documented that students struggle in the transition from middle school into high school, and it remains a persistent problem. A number of strategies that utilize multi-tiered systems of support can be implemented to address this issue. First and foremost, schools already implementing PBIS can enhance the use of this framework specifically in the 9th grade. Doing so will increase the structure and predictability for incoming students, and will build strong systems of support early. Another strategy is to implement the use of data-based decision making and planning focused on the 9th grade

through a freshmen-specific leadership team. According to McIntosh, et al. (2014), "The single most efficient process for achieving a valued outcome in a complex system is to define, measure, and report progress toward achieving that outcome on a regular cycle." This summarizes the central work of a freshmen-specific leadership team. Two other practices to better support 9th graders are to explicitly teach and reinforce a set of identified knowledge and skills and utilize the support of upperclassmen. Whether a school is able to implement one of these approaches or to layer multiple together to freshmen support, it is important to keep in mind how these efforts will align with the implementation of other freshmen-specific or schoolwide work, as doing a few things well will be far more effective than doing many things poorly. Whatever the specific approach, a systematic approach to investing in 9th graders as they enter high school will go a long way to improve the experience and outcomes of students.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Including Student Voice in PBIS Implementation

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### Setting the Stage: Why Include Student Voice?

Schools across the nation implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are finding success in getting student voice around implementation in the PBIS process. The format and processes used varies from school to school based on the cultural context of the high school with the ultimate goal of gaining student voice with the development and implementation of a PBIS process (See Chapter 2 on context and systems). Student voice is defined as a collective decision-making process “in which youth have opportunities to share in the school decisions that shape their lives and the lives of their peers.” (Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner, 2013, p. 294).

Obtaining student voice is not new in education, it first started in the 1960s (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Currently most of the input from students is sought via focus groups and surveys which really limits students’ active involvement in making and revising school practices and policies. (Mitra, 2004). These methods of get-

ting student voice may result in misinterpretation of what students are saying, causing schools to implement interventions based upon the adults’ interpretations of the student responses (Yonezawa & Jones, 2007). One way around this is to have students involved in the entire process of systems change as they can provide ongoing guidance and make meaning of what students share. (Mitra, 2004). There is an increasing trend of having a cross representation of the student population involved in the development of school policies and practices because students today want their voices included (Bohanon, Fenning, Borgmeier, Flannery & Malloy, 2009). However, there are no national mandates or policies requiring student voice (Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner, 2013)

By having students’ voice included when critical elements are introduced to the entire school, schools will be able to “deliver the same foundational interventions [elements of PBIS] in genuine, contextually and developmentally appropriate ways” (Bohanon, Fenning, Borgmeier, Flannery, Malloy, 2009, p. 587) engaging more stakeholders (i.e. students) than

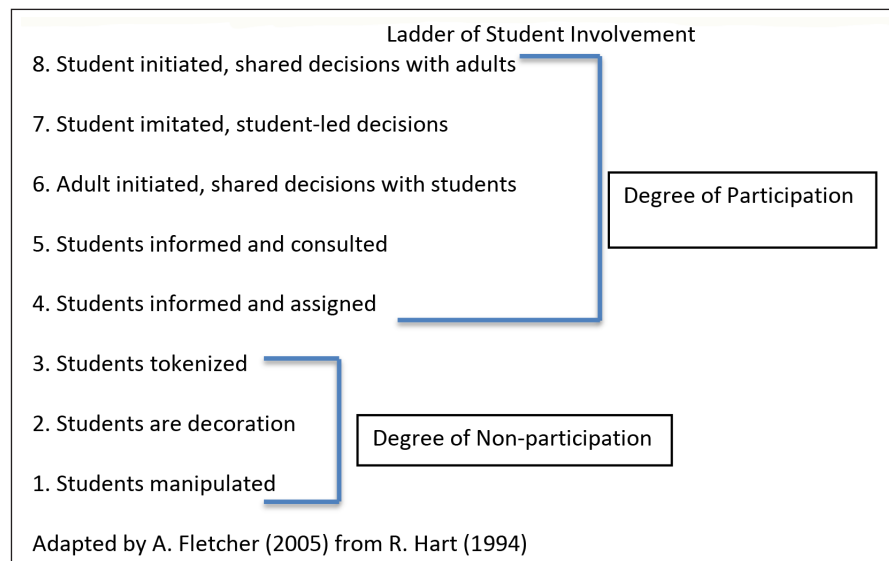
if developed by staff alone (Yonezawa & Jones, 2007). Students are more willing to accept changes in school policies and practices if they know their peers' voices were included with the development (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Student membership also helps to keep the PBIS team accountable to the intended implementation plan (Mitra, 2004).

One of the desired outcomes of PBIS implementation is the social emotional development of students. Research has shown the inclusion of students in the process of school change has resulted in improvements in social emotional development (i.e. life-skills, self-esteem, social skills, building relationships, leadership, and problem solving skills) (Bradshaw, et al., 2014). Another desired outcome of PBIS is the improvement in school climate and behavior. Research has also shown that involving students in making school based changes results in better school attendance, climate, school connectedness and school pride. (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra, 2004)

A number of schools have begun to include students in the implementation of PBIS, but not in a systematic way across multiple activities. In *The Ladder of Student Involvement in School*, Fletcher (2005) identified key characteristics needed to engage high levels of student involvement (Figure 1). The Ladder of Student

Involvement in School was adapted by Fletcher (2005) from the work of Hart (1994) and identifies degrees of both participation and non-participation. Each number represents a rung of a ladder (level of participation) and can be applied in different activities or situations, thus there is a continuum of ways engaging students.

Student voice must be meaningful to the students in order to have the desired impact and be appropriate for the situation or activity. The degrees of participation includes but are not limited to school-wide approaches, high levels of student authority, interrelated strategies and personal commitment. In order to measure the degree to which students are engaged in a significant way. These degrees of participation are not indicating a process but rather a range that varies depending on the situation or activity. In the subsequent sections, we will identify examples of student voice in the implementation of PBIS and illustrate how they match with the degrees of participation along rungs 4-8 of *The Ladder*



**Figure 1.** Ladder of Student Involvement

of *Student Involvement [The Ladder]*. We do not discuss the first three levels of participation of The Ladder as in this paper we are focused on increasing participation.

### Examples of Student Voice across the Tier 1 Critical Elements

High school youth who are actively involved in the PBIS team, will provide input around the development and roll out of each of the critical elements of PBIS (i.e. expectations and rules, teaching the expectations and rules, reinforcement systems, etc.). There are a variety of ways that students' voice can be heard by the PBIS team; students may sit on the school-wide PBIS team, or there may be a student subcommittee or club with one student being a liaison to the school-wide PBIS team (Bohanon, Fenning, Borgmeier, Flannery, Malloy, 2009). Having student representation can also ensure easier access to all students and a more honest response by their peers. At times student voice does not neatly fit into only one degree of participation but may be representative of several types of participation. The remainder of the examples will highlight examples for each degree of participation.

To better understand how input from students can influence the development of PBIS at high schools, we gathered examples from two primary groups. First, PBIS coaches who work in comprehensive high schools in several states were offered the opportunity to participate in interviews focused on in-depth understanding of what implementation looks like at a high

school level. Included in these interviews were specific questions addressing the extent that student voice was involved at all tiers of PBIS. There was a spectrum of responses as to how the schools embedded student voice into PBIS and their shared examples are included below.

Just as traditional high schools can and should utilize student voice in PBIS, there are examples of alternative settings that have infused student input into as many elements as possible. To illustrate the efforts in alternative school settings a second group of examples from the Pace Center for Girls will be shared. The Pace Center for Girls are gender-responsive alternative educational centers that support adolescent females who need more intensive supports for academics and social-emotional learning. At the core of the program, Pace emphasizes a strength-based approach to empower the females attending their program. Each Center operates with the same guidelines, however the approach and actions may vary. All nineteen of the Pace Centers were asked to participate in a survey to gain more insight into youth voice at their school along with an optional follow-up phone call. As with traditional high schools, the context of the high school setting needs of their community needed to be taken into consideration so the use of student voices varies across locations.

#### *Degree of Participation (Rung 4): Students Informed and Assigned*

At the fourth rung of *The Ladder*, *Students Informed and Assigned*, the students are given specific tasks that have been identified and designed

by the adults. The students assist by carrying out these specific activities but are given specific directions about expectations. For example, one high school reported that each year seniors are given one wall to decorate with the focus on PBIS. One year the students used blue and white tiles to spell out “Anchor down for PBIS” to tie PBIS into their school mascot. Additional high schools described using school clubs or classrooms to increase visibility. The club or class was assigned a bulletin board on campus to decorate as part of a competition to highlight the PBIS expectations. This became a competition among the clubs and classrooms to best represent PBIS at their school. After the competition concluded, the school had many quality posters and products all centered on PBIS at their school. Another example would be having the PBIS team identify a need for a video displaying examples and non-examples of the expectations in the hallway. The drama club is given the task for developing the video.

At both the PACE Centers and at comprehensive high schools, there have been students identified who provide tours of the school for guests. These student leaders not only talk about their curriculum or unique school program but the leaders also articulate to visitors what PBIS implementation looks like at their school. During tours, the students point out various aspects of the environment, like the posters/mural or reward/point school stores that support PBIS. Additionally, student leaders articulate what types of behaviors are exhibited that earn reinforcers and share personal anecdotes about rewards and recognition events.

### *Degree of Participation (Rung 5): Students Informed and Consulted.*

At the next rung of *The Ladder, Students Informed and Consulted*, students are informed about an activity designed by adults or a specific situation identified by the adults and asked to give their advice. The students are told how the information will be used and what the outcomes are. At this rung students have more of an opportunity for input than only carrying out staff's ideas. The adults then use the information provided by the students to make changes. Successful PBIS teams use data-based decision making to inform implementation and problem-solve issues as they arise. Part of problem-solving relies on analyzing why a particular issue might be occurring and gathering any additional information from stakeholder groups to better understand the reasons for the issue. Since students are a large stakeholder group, they are a logical resource to be used to better understand the barriers and to determine steps to address school-wide problems. An example of this would be reaching out to students and sharing with them the development of the soon to be implemented acknowledgement system. The adults on the PBIS team ask students what they would like to earn for their tickets, students provide suggestions. The adults then take into consideration which of the items suggested by the students are feasible for the school to provide for the tickets. When high school coaches were interviewed they indicated that sometimes school staff were surprised at what was motivating to their students. Examples of these were: location of the student

of the month parking spot, the types of food students wanted (i.e. taki's chips), and a name your own gift card. The students confirmed that they liked the idea of candy bars, extra graduation tickets, tickets to sports events, yearbooks, tickets to proms/homecoming, etc.

### *Degree of Participation (Rung 6): Adult Initiated, Shared Decisions With Students*

Most of the high schools that we talked with, both comprehensive and alternative, were using student involvement in the category of *Adult Initiated, Shared Decisions with Students*, rung 6 of *The Ladder*. In these instances the program or activities are identified and initiated by the adults but the decision making is shared with the students. The students in these instances are part of the development of the solutions or activities. Based on a review of school-wide data, one high school identified absences and tardies to class as an issue of concern. This school has two students on their PBIS team. With direction from the other team members, the two students developed an anonymous survey asking students to identify the number of times he or she was absent from school, the cause of the absence along with how many times he or she were tardy to class, the reason for the tardy. The survey also solicited ideas regarding types of reinforcement students would like for being in school and to class on time. The results of the survey are being used by the PBIS team (including those student team members) to identify what environmental changes may need to be made to address the root causes for absences and tardies, as well as, using

the reinforcers the students identified for being present and on time.

Since one of the guiding principles of the Pace Centers is to empower the young women who attend their program, their level of student responsibility might be more intense than in comprehensive high schools. One Center described the role of student leadership to include participation in the interview process for new staff, as well as providing input on staff evaluations. At another Pace Center, while the PBIS team was brainstorming ways to behaviorally define 'respect'; one Pace Center team decided to charge their student PBIS team with developing the definition. After a definition was agreed on the students were asked to develop ways to teach the new definitions. The student-led team developed activities for how to teach the rest of the center what 'respect' meant. The methods for teaching the definition varied. They included standard lesson plans, skits, songs and multi-media products. The intention was to have the students at the Center take ownership of not only the definition but the multiple ways to deliver the meaning. The PBIS Team at one Pace Center had their student team identify their school-wide expectations which they decided to refer to as 'Pillars of Character'. The team assigned different cohorts of students to develop a way of teaching each pillar to the entire Center. The cohorts delivered these lessons using any platform available to them. The end products resulted in a variety of methods for teaching the Pillars of Character. Each cohort used the students' strengths to develop a quality product. Similar to teaching the definitions of behavior,

cohorts used multiple platforms including video, skits and songs that were relatable to all the students in the center. Since Pace and comprehensive high schools often have students entering and exiting at all points throughout the school year, products such as these can be continuously used to help teach students new to the schools.

High schools are always seeking effective responses to problem behavior that are meaningful and appropriate given the age of their students. Schools specifically cite needing alternatives to suspension for students whose behavior results in a referral to the office. One high school decided to utilize student voice for some “out of the box” ideas that would be effective. The student PBIS team was asked by administration to develop and conduct a survey of their peers asking for input as to what administration could do to decrease the chances for students to repeat behaviors resulting in an office-discipline referral. The staff reviewed the results of the survey and identified three new alternatives to out-of-school suspension they could try implementing and asked for student feedback on the alternatives. The three new consequences were: temporarily losing parking privileges on campus, temporarily losing the ability to participate in some extracurricular activities. The administration realized that for these new consequences to be effective they would have to make sure that it would be meaningful to the student (i.e. the student had to drive to school for the temporary loss of parking to be effective).

At a comprehensive high school, one PBIS team showed their PBIS student leaders an example of a video from another middle school

in the district that was used to teach the school-wide expectations on the morning announcements. The high school students felt the video was too adult driven and felt that it needed to be more student driven. After viewing the video from the middle school, the high school leaders developed a program called ‘Four Panel’ for the morning announcements. The PBIS coach acted as the moderator and the PBIS student leaders developed questions to be asked of four random students on the morning announcements related to one of the school-wide expectations. The video concluded with a question that could be answered in a class discussion following the announcements. The next year, the student leaders continued to modify the format for the morning announcements to keep the content relevant and fresh, since this next year the students were leading the changes the activity would now be considered an example of the next level of participation (Rung 7) a student initiated, student led activity.

Visibility of PBIS is an important part of implementation. Visibility helps staff, students, families and on-site visitors to know that the school is a PBIS school, the school-wide expectations and rules for that specific school. A key way to make PBIS visible on campus is publicly posting the school-wide expectations and rules. One of the easiest ways for the students to be included in increasing visibility of PBIS is to allow the students to develop the artwork to highlight the school-wide expectations. There are many approaches to involving students in creating these products. One high school used the graphics design class to use the skills and

techniques taught in the course to create unique and creative posters. At another high school, a student coined the term R3 (R cubed) for their expectations which were respect, responsibility and readiness to learn and designed the graphic for the term. The faculty, staff and students all responded enthusiastically to this design.

Some comprehensive high schools have indicated that students are assigned by the PBIS team as the individuals who run their school store. At one high school students with disabilities have run the school store as part of their math curriculum, and at a different high school it was the students in the PBIS Leadership course who took on the responsibility. The student team was charged with managing all aspects of that store this included budgeting, purchase requests, inventory, identifying store hours and managing the store while opened. To ensure that items being purchased were important to the students, the team surveyed students throughout the year and also regularly reviewed inventory to determine the most frequently purchased items.

### *Degree of Participation (Rung 7). Student Initiated, Student-Led Decisions*

At the next rung of *The Ladder, Student Initiated, Student-Led Decisions*, students initiate and direct the project or activities. In these types of decisions the adults are involved but only in a supportive role. At one comprehensive high school the reinforcement system solely consisted of students being recognized by staff. The student team suggested the opportunity for peer-to-peer recognition along with students recognizing staff. The student team developed the format

and implemented the peer-to-peer recognition and student-staff recognition. Another example of this was with the one high school previously described that had the student led team assigned the task of developing videos, the second year of implementation the students proposed to develop a different series of videos and then presented them back to the PBIS team. Schools with PBIS student led teams can encourage more student initiated, student led activities by this team. Since these the teams hold regularly scheduled meetings where the students developed an agenda and were responsible for facilitating the meeting. These student PBIS teams had an assigned staff member advisor but the team itself identified action steps based on their agenda. Once recommendations were developed either one of the student team members or the advisor would bring back to the PBIS team.

### *Degree of Participation (Rung 8). Student Initiated, Shared Decision Making*

At the eighth rung of *The Ladder, Student Initiated, Shared Decision Making*, the students identify and initiate the activities or projects and the decision making is shared by adults and the students.

Time is often a barrier for high schools implementing PBIS. Student team members might often be involved in multiple activities. Looking at their existing schedule and resources, one school used their “Anchor Hour” to allow for the team to meet, action plan and complete tasks. The “Anchor Hour” was a time that students could use for teacher office hours to get extra assistance with classes, to make up work or receive Tier 2 supports. The student PBIS

team used this time to move around campus and capture the input of their peers. Initially the team began with a needs assessment on how to improve PBIS at their school; then followed-up with getting feedback on the reward and recognition system. These students initiated collecting feedback from their peers and then shared the results back to the PBIS team and the two groups collectively made decisions of next steps.

After one high school had initiated some alternatives to suspension, the PBIS student team approached administration about a new idea. They had devised a plan for infractions for minor behaviors (i.e. tardies, dress code, etc.) where students would earn points similar to speeding tickets. Once the student hit a set limit number of points for minor behaviors, he or she would not be able to participate in school activities. In order for a student to be allowed to participate in the school activities again, the student would have to “work off the points” earned; the student would have to talk to the staff member who assigned the point to determine what an appropriate task would be to “work off the point”. For example, if the point was for being tardy to class, then the student may have to give his or her time back to the teacher at lunch, before or after school or a mutually agreed time. Once the point was worked off, then an administrator would be notified and a point would be removed.

### **Challenges and Solutions for Gaining Student Voice**

There are a variety of challenges in gaining student voice. Three of the barriers include time, identification of students to engage in the work,

and gaining input from a variety and majority of students. To address the barrier of time, one solution was to get students involved during lunch. Other solutions include building time into the master schedule for an elective credit PBIS Leadership course and developing a PBIS club that meets before or after school. A second barrier is identification of a variety of students to engage in the work. Schools have tackled this barrier by asking for staff recommendations of students to invite to participate and have asked students to volunteer to be on the team with a teacher recommendation. Another school asked for each student club or groups to nominate a representative to serve on a student PBIS committee. Once the students are identified, it is important to review the list to determine if the selected students represent the student body.

There may still be times when the PBIS team needs to hear from the majority of the student body not just the select group. Several examples were already provided on how school PBIS team leaders developed surveys to get input from a greater majority of the student body. Recently, a high school senior identified the need to get more input from more students so he approached the PBIS team liaison about developing a QR code to post around campus with questions the entire student body could answer. The results were to be gathered and then shared back with the school based administration along with recommendations for change. Gaining student voice is a new way of work at many schools, it may be the first time a school asks student to provide suggestions for making changes to school practices and policies.

### Recommendations and Conclusions

By including student voice in the development of a school's PBIS implementation, schools have seen a greater "buy-in" from the students. When students participate in development of the PBIS system, there is often an increase in faculty buy-in. As highlighted in this chapter, the biggest outcome has been on a systems level; changes have been made to the school practices and systems as a result of student voice. If the voice of the students had not been sought or heard then it is possible that these new practices may never have been implemented at the school. The results have been an increase in the visibility of PBIS, the identification of alternative administrative decisions, and reductions in problem behavior.

As with implementation of all areas of PBIS, there is not a one-size fits all approach to using student voice. While gaining student input might not be a new concept, the level to which student voice has been obtained and utilized to implement and sustain PBIS efforts is still evolving. Most of the schools start small with student involvement and usually along a lower rung of The Ladder with students being informed and assigned a task (Fletcher, 2005). Schools should start small by identifying and implementing one or two activities to start getting student voice on PBIS. Then, over time the school should identify additional way across the various rungs of the ladder to increase student voice in the implementation of PBIS. Once the school experiences success with student voice and sees a difference in their PBIS plans, it will encourage them to

increase the student involvement along The Ladder. High schools have the opportunity to delve into this practice in a meaningful way due to the developmental stage of their students.

Adolescence is a time when belonging is critical. Student voice is an effective way of providing both increase student buy-in and students' sense of belonging to the school. Creating opportunities for students to not only provide their thoughts and opinions, but to be leaders in developing and improving the PBIS framework can create a climate and culture that is beneficial for everyone at the school. By getting student actively involved by having their voices heard and using their voice for decision making around systems, practices and policies, the school will only improve their implementation of PBIS.

It is helpful for trainers and technical assistance providers, to become familiar with The Ladder model and examples of different types of student involvement along each rung. Schools can build on current practices and with technical assistance can intensify efforts to garner more meaningful student involvement. With continued involvement in training and supporting high schools, technical assistance providers can build a wide-variety of examples that can be shared with both schools and other trainers., Through networking, schools can gain valuable ideas that would make sense in the context of their school.

There is more research that remains to be done in the area of student voice and its impact on effective implementation and outcomes of PBIS in high schools (i.e. climate, discipline

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data, attendance data, etc.). Both qualitative and quantitative research can help inform these practices. Working collaboratively with training and technical assistance specialists to identify schools utilizing student voice to impact PBIS, researchers and evaluators can identify promising practices that have a positive impact on desired outcomes and the degree to which they can be replicated to have similar results for other schools.

Note: We would like to say thank you to the PBIS teams and coaches from the following schools for sharing their experiences with student voice and PBIS: Atlantic Coast High School, Bell High School, Coral Shores High School, Cypress Lake High School, Eau Gallie High School, Haines City High School, Heritage High School, Lake Brantley High School, Nature Coast Technical High School, Pace Centers, Paul J. Hagerty High School, Sumter Alternative High School, and Timber Creek High School.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Providing a Safe & Supportive High School Environment for Every Student

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**A**t a time when divisive rhetoric, violence, and social isolation increasingly threaten the well-being of our nation's youth (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016a, 2016b; Twenge, Martin, & Campbell, 2018), the call to provide a safe and inclusive school environment has never been more urgent. This chapter will provide examples and guidance on ways high schools may enhance implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to intentionally include and support students who may be at risk of marginalization. PBIS is now being implemented in over 3,000 high schools nationwide (Freeman, Wilkinson, & Vanlone, 2016), and is widely regarded as an effective approach for achieving a positive and inclusive school climate (Bohanon et al., 2006; Bohanon, Goodman, & McIntosh, 2009; Bradshaw, Bottiani, Osher, & Sugai, 2014; Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016; U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). Specifically, PBIS implementation in high schools is related to reductions in office

referrals and suspensions, increases in attendance and academic achievement, and improved overall school climate at the high school level (Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman, Simonsen, et al., 2016; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery, 2015).

Even so, emerging research outcomes have been more variable with respect to the extent to which the benefits of PBIS implementation fully extend to students who are at-risk for marginalization. For example, researchers (e.g., Sandomierski, 2011; Vincent, Sprague, Pavel, Tobin, & Gau, 2015) found that PBIS implementation does not fully alleviate disparities for students with disabilities or who are racial minorities. In a larger scale study, McIntosh, Gion, and Bastable (2018) found that schools that are implementing PBIS with fidelity still struggle with disproportionality; however, the risk indices for individual racial and ethnic groups of students in these schools were the same or lower than the national average.

Less is known about the outcomes for other potentially marginalized youth (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and questioning

youth [LGBTQ], religious or cultural minorities, or students belonging to multiple demographic groups) in PBIS schools. It is clear that LGBTQ youth have a higher risk for suicide, higher rates of victimization from bullying, poor mental health, lower academic achievement, lower school attendance, and lower school attachment overall (Demissee, Rasberry, Steiner, Brener, & McManus, 2018) and that schools have historically been reluctant to change their practices to better support these students (Demissee et al., 2018). Furthermore, students who belong to multiple social categories can experience compounded risk. For example, students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspension as students without a disability, and African American students are more than three times as likely to receive a suspension than white students. But when suspension rates for disability are combined with race, we see the risk of suspension for African American students with disabilities grow to *five times* the risk for white students without a disability (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

These findings are troubling and fall far short of the fundamental values inherent to PBIS, but they can be changed. Culturally responsive PBIS implementation (CR-PBIS) has shown promise for reducing disproportionality and improving outcomes for students from historically marginalized groups (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Hall, Ibaraki, Huang, Marti, & Stice, 2016; Lai et al., 2014; McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, 2018). While specific examples of CR-PBIS implemen-

tation will vary according to the unique characteristics of each school and its diverse student body, there are several core components that will be common to all schools aiming to create a welcoming and inclusive Tier 1 system (Levenson, Smith, McIntosh, Rose, & Pinkelman, 2016). Table 1 summarizes these core components and illustrates areas of alignment with the OSEP PBIS Technical Assistance Center's five-point intervention approach for enhancing equity in school discipline (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, Smolkowski, & Sugai, 2018).

Culturally responsive implementation is an integral part of PBIS implementation – indeed, practitioners should note that “PBIS is not fully implemented until it is culturally responsive” (Levenson et al., 2016, p. 2). At the high school level, unique contextual influences make culturally responsive practices especially critical for successful implementation. Larger and more diverse student bodies, larger staff caseloads, relatively autonomous organizational structures, and an adolescent student population all require a more intensive focus on two-way communication and active stakeholder involvement in the development, evaluation, and maintenance of the school-wide plan (Bohanon et al., 2009; Flannery, Frank, Kato, Doren, & Fenning, 2015; Putnam et al., 2009). In addition, many familiar implementation challenges such as limited time, communication systems, insufficient data systems, and a departmental structure (Flannery et al., 2015), may be exacerbated given the increased time and complexity involved in developing authentic partnerships with numerous diverse groups. Culturally

**Table 1.** Alignment Between Core Components of Culturally Responsive PBIS and the TA Center’s 5-point Intervention Approach for Discipline Equity.

5 Points Intervention Approach to Equity <sup>1</sup>	Culturally Responsive PBIS Components
<p><b>1. Collect, Use, and Report Disaggregated Discipline Data</b> School teams should have instantaneous access to disaggregated office discipline referrals and discipline patterns for groups at risk for marginalization.</p> <p><b>2. Implement a Behavior Framework that is Preventive, Multi-Tiered, and Culturally Responsive</b> A culturally responsive framework requires stakeholder participation (voice) in the design and selection of practices. Culturally responsive frameworks build on the strengths inherent to students’ backgrounds, emphasize teaching skills to fluency, and avoid punishing behaviors that fall outside of mainstream culture (supportive environment, situational appropriateness).</p> <p><b>3. Use Engaging Instruction to Reduce the Opportunity (Achievement) Gap</b> Increasing student and family voice in academic and behavioral curricula makes instruction more engaging for students. Providing opportunities throughout the school day where code switching is not required allows for instructional techniques that are more engaging for students (situational appropriateness).</p> <p><b>4. Develop Policies with Accountability for Disciplinary Equity</b> Policies should enable schools to provide opportunities where code switching is not required for success (situational appropriateness); policies should avoid penalizing behaviors that have a strong cultural influence (e.g., dress code, language; supportive environment).</p>	<p><b>Data for Equity</b> Disaggregating school-wide behavior, attendance, and academic data (and in some cases, obtaining additional data) to examine whether implementation is effective for all student subgroups.</p> <p><b>Voice</b> Providing students, families, and community stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to influence daily activities in the school.</p> <p><b>Supportive Environment</b> Students of all backgrounds feel valued and respected. Student cultures are reflected throughout the school building, in school-wide practices, and in behavioral and academic curricula. Staff build students’ fluency with code-switching skills and avoid punishing students into assimilation with mainstream culture.</p> <p><b>Situational Appropriateness</b> Explicitly teaching students skills for code switching, as well as providing opportunities throughout the school day where code switching is not a requirement for success.</p>
<p><b>5. Develop Policies with Accountability for Disciplinary Equity</b> Policies should enable schools to provide opportunities where code switching is not required for success (situational appropriateness); policies should avoid penalizing behaviors that have a strong cultural influence (e.g., dress code, language; supportive environment).</p>	<p><b>Identity Awareness</b> Remaining conscious of the ways various identities (self-identities and the identities of others) may interact to influence daily interactions.</p>

1. <http://bit.ly/5-PointDisciplineEquity>

responsive practices also present unique challenges, including staff insecurity related to their ability to provide culturally responsive support, defensiveness over the fear of being “called out” for biased actions, deficit-based thinking about students’ cultures, a lack of familiarity with students’ interests, and the fear of violating district policies by creating supportive and inclusive environments (DiAngelo, 2011; Gorski, 2016). These challenges are not insurmountable, however, and can be aided by a variety of factors, that are described in the next section.

### **Culturally Responsive PBIS Practices in High School Settings**

Practices that develop a climate where every student feels safe and supported must be carefully selected and implemented with fidelity to maximize student outcomes. In general, leadership teams should prioritize practices that are supported by empirical evidence and aligned with documented student and school needs. In this section we provide recommendations and examples of practices used by high schools to expand PBIS implementation to ensure all students are effectively included and supported. We use the 5-Point Intervention Approach for Discipline Equity to organize our examples and recommendations.

#### *1. Collect, Use, and Report Disaggregated Discipline Data*

Using data for decision-making is critical for ensuring that students have equitable access and opportunity (U.S. Departments of

Education and Justice, 2014). The PBIS Center guide for using discipline data to identify and address disproportionality (McIntosh, Barnes, Morris, & Eliason, 2014) offers detailed information and resources for schools; including how to calculate several measures of disproportionality and how to use that information to guide intervention. The school-wide information system (SWIS), used by many PBIS schools, provides schools with race and ethnicity reports and drill down options to facilitate this work.

Using the tools above, disaggregating data by race/ethnicity or socio-economic status is relatively straight forward as schools generally have access to that information for students; however, it may be more difficult for schools to examine outcomes for other student groups (e.g., LGBTQ students, students from religious or cultural minorities). In addition to the practical challenges related to capturing data from sexual minority youth or other sub groups, schools must also balance the responsibility of protecting students who do not wish to have their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, or other personal information revealed. The *Georgia Brief School Climate Survey* [<http://bit.ly/SchoolCS1>] offers schools an opportunity to collect information about students perceptions of the overall school climate. This survey offers optional demographic questions that include gender identity and sexual orientation at the middle and high school levels, allowing schools to disaggregate results by those groups. The survey has also been validated for use with both LGB students and students with disabilities (LaSalle, Rocha Neves,

Freeman, & Sugai, 2017; Lombardi, Rifenbark, & Freeman, 2017).

While discipline and school climate data offer important insights for equity, it may not be sufficient to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the needs of a diverse student body. Disaggregated attendance and academic data (such as the percent of students on-track for graduation, the percent of students enrolled in AP/ IB courses, etc.) can be used to identify whether there are groups for whom the current school practice is inadequate or culturally irrelevant.

School-wide screening for behavioral or mental health risk is another way for schools to ensure that any student who may need additional support is identified regardless of demographic characteristics. There are a number of free or low cost screeners available (see ci3t screening tools; <http://bit.ly/ci3tScreening>). Other data sources such as nurse or counselor visits, exit tickets, reflection sheets, focus groups, or brief interviews can also provide detailed information about equity and inclusive practices. With these data, educators must ensure they obtain information from students who are representative of the diversity within their student population. Multiple sessions and/or repeated samplings may be necessary to hear from all groups. When combined with other data sources, focus groups and interviews can help to identify the root causes of inequities within the school.

**Using multiple data sources.** Several high schools in Florida began using the *Equity Profile Tool and Problem Definition Template* [<http://bit.ly/EquityTool>] to help guide their work.

Leadership teams disaggregate their discipline data to see how different racial groups and students with disabilities are impacted by school-wide procedures. In several cases, the process of disaggregating their office referrals helped teams identify that their staff were not applying the discipline standards consistently. This made it difficult to discover legitimate patterns in the data, which in turn limited their ability to identify helpful interventions. These teams shared this discovery with their staff, provided training and coaching to improve their colleagues' use of the discipline process, and ultimately lowered the risk for all students to receive an office referral.

Several schools discovered that even after taking this step, African American students received a disproportionate share of referrals. However, improved consistency in defining the problem behaviors, locations, and consequences allowed teams to see clear patterns in their data. For example, in one school it became clear that the most frequent location for African American students to receive a referral was the classroom, and the most frequent offense was defiance. When the Leadership Team held focus groups to obtain their staff's perspectives on the problem, a number of explanations were given that did not match the discipline data, revealing potential cultural or racial bias – specifically, many staff assumed African American students were extremely loud and frequently violent, when there was no concrete evidence to support this theory.

The Leadership Team then conducted focus groups with a representative sample of African American families and students and

learned that they experienced a variety of different biases throughout the school day: staff failing to address derogatory racial comments made by non-African American peers; rarely receiving acknowledgement for demonstrating desired behaviors and/or academic competencies; teachers calling parents repeatedly to report minor infractions by their child; and the parents never receiving calls to acknowledge prosocial behaviors or accomplishments. At the conclusion of the focus groups, the leadership team's understanding of disproportionate discipline at their school had moved from "blaming the students" for choosing to engage in violent or disruptive behavior, to seeing that relationships between staff and students had become strained. Based on the combination of discipline and focus group data, the team was able to clearly identify staff and student patterns that needed to be addressed.

### *2. Implement a Behavior Framework That is Preventive, Multi-Tiered, and Culturally Responsive*

Implementing a preventative, multi-tiered, and culturally responsive framework requires attending to stakeholder participation when selecting practices and creating a school environment that supports and builds on the strengths of diverse student and family characteristics. The PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide provides a number of general examples and considerations for schools (Levenson et al., 2016). The following examples demonstrate practices high schools have used to increase student and family voice, build supportive environments, and teach

situational appropriateness within the PBIS framework.

**Communicate frequently and using preferred methods.** Understanding (and using) stakeholders' (e.g., students, families, community members) preferred communication method (phone, text, email, social media), preferred times for contact, and preferences for types of information can increase schools' engagement with marginalized groups. Schools should offer regular and transparent communication with respect to school practices and outcomes. In addition, schools must consider and respond to stakeholder perspectives and suggestions in a meaningful exchange of ideas. The freely available e-book *Aligning and Integrating Family Engagement in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (Weist, Garbacz, Lane, & Kincaid, 2017; <http://bit.ly/FamilyPBIS>) offers specific strategies for schools looking to increase family engagement within the PBIS framework. When relationships between schools and specific stakeholder groups are strained, high schools may utilize the support of key community members or advocates who can serve as a "go-between" until direct and productive communication can be established. In one high school, the Leadership Team increased positive messages to students and families by logging "positive referrals" and setting up a system to automatically send an email to the student and an adult designated by the student when they were named in a positive referral.

**Engage students in teaching school-wide expectations.** Giving students the opportunity to explain what the school-wide expectations

look like in different settings and circumstances is one way of bridging cultural divides between students, groups, and staff. Some high schools have held art contests and poetry jams, or simply had students fill out a grid that illustrated how each expectation looked at school, at home, and in the community (see *The PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide* [<http://bit.ly/CulturalResponsivenessGuide>] for an example). Displaying students' messages throughout the school helped to reinforce the idea that each student's life outside of the school was as valuable as their performance while inside of the school. In addition, some high schools have offered student-led workshops on school-wide expectations and behavioral practices for families. By offering student rather than faculty-led workshops, schools were able to increase the number of family members who attended and provide a leadership opportunity for students.

**Use inclusive language.** Another simple practice that can be used to communicate acceptance within the school is to use inclusive language that reflects students' preferences for terminology and the diversity of the student body. For example, using students' preferred names or pronouns and asking groups for preferred terms when describing relevant physical or social characteristics (i.e., Black vs. African-American; gay vs. homosexual), communicates respect for another's feelings and a willingness to change personal habits to help others feel more comfortable. The language used in policies and on forms should likewise be inclusive of all students' backgrounds; swapping out pronouns such as he/she with "they" or "them" can support students with diverse gender identities (GLSEN,

2018), while substituting the word "guardian" for "mother/father" can be more inclusive of students with diverse family structures. In one high school, faculty members sent out an interest survey at the beginning of the year to "get to know" their students. In that survey they included the option for students to indicate their preferred pronouns or name. In another example, students with and without disabilities developed public service announcements (PSAs) about including students with disabilities in school activities and delivered the messages as part of the school's morning announcements.

**Identify "safe" spaces and staff.** In addition, every student should have at least one adult at the school who they can talk to without feeling like they will be judged or worry that their confidentiality will be compromised. Gay-Straight-Alliance (GSA) clubs are one format that can be used to provide a safe space for students who identify as LGBTQ, as well as straight students and adults who support them (<https://www.glsen.org>). Similarly, same-race affinity groups can be a place where youth can draw support from each other and share common experiences. Faculty members can identify themselves as "safe and supportive" by simply displaying a "safe sticker" or similar sign in their classroom or on the door (e.g., Safe Space Kits and other materials available in English and Spanish from GLSEN). These signals are easy yet powerful ways to let marginalized students know which faculty members are willing to be supportive if they need to talk with someone.

**Implement a school-wide bully prevention program.** At a minimum, all students and staff should know how to respond when they

hear students (or other staff members) using derogatory language. Derogatory language, verbal harassment and bullying are common place for minority students. Implementing a bully prevention program or curriculum (e.g., Expect Respect; Stiller, Nese, Tomlanovich, Horner, & Ross, 2013; or Teaching Tolerance, 2017) as a part of the schools' Tier 1 PBIS framework is one way to ensure all students and staff know how to recognize and respond to bullying. For example, one high school began the school year by asking students to identify personal strengths that would replace common words used in bullying incidents. Specifically, students began the lesson by writing down words used by bullies (e.g., “nerd,” “geek,” “short,” etc.). Students ripped up their papers, and started fresh by writing down strengths displayed by their peers (e.g., “good at math,” “good listener,” “strong athlete,” etc.). Students then focused on the school-wide expectation to “Be Kind” to each other, and brainstormed ways they could use their peers' personal strengths to demonstrate the expectation.

### 3. Use Engaging Instruction to Reduce The Opportunity (Achievement) Gap

There are a variety of specific strategies schools can use to increase student engagement in learning. The *Examples of Engaging Instruction to Increase Equity in Education* guide [<http://bit.ly/EngagingInstruction>] provides examples of how schools can use explicit instruction, build and prime background knowledge of learners, increase opportunities to respond, and provide effective performance feedback to learners (Chaparro, Nese, & McIntosh, 2015). In this

section, we provide several additional considerations for high schools.

**Teach an inclusive curriculum.** Another important consideration for high schools is a curriculum that reflects the lives and histories of historically marginalized populations. Inclusive curricula have been linked to increased perceptions of school safety and fairness overall (Burdge, Snapp, Laub, Russell, & Moody, 2013; Snapp, Burdge, Licona, & Russell, 2015). High school leadership teams may consider selecting specific curricula or units (e.g., GLSEN Curriculum, Welcoming Schools Lesson Plans; <http://bit.ly/GLSENCurriculum>), or working with faculty to review and modify existing curricula to ensure diverse representation, and visit the *Facing History* [<http://bit.ly/FacingHistory1>] or *Teaching Tolerance* [<http://bit.ly/TeachingTolerance1>] to pick up additional lessons to fill the gaps.

**Engage diverse student leaders.** One challenge in high schools is that student government or leadership groups are not always fully representative of the student body. High schools may need to be more intentional about ensuring that all student groups and demographics have an opportunity for meaningful engagement and representation in the implementation process.

In one high school, administrators created a “Student Leadership” class, in which a diverse group of students could earn credit towards their diploma. The students in this class were tasked with the goal of obtaining input from their peers on how to make their school a more welcoming and engaging place. The students decided to develop a “QR code” that would be linked to a

Google Forms survey. Every two weeks the students in the course would generate new questions for the student body, create a Google Forms survey to collect answers, and link a new QR code to the survey. The QR codes would be placed in a location that was relevant to specific issues addressed in the survey questions, and students would scan the code as they passed through the location and submit their answers. Once the poll closed, the students in the leadership course reviewed the answers, shared the main themes with the school's administrators, and then worked with the administrators to develop strategies that addressed their peers' feedback. As high school students tend to be motivated by technology, the format of the QR codes and the Google Forms tapped into an idea the majority of the student body was willing to buy into. Not only did this strategy allow more students to have a voice in their school's practices, but it also empowered students in the leadership class to gain valuable life skills while having a direct impact on the school climate, culture and practices.

### 4. Develop Policies with Accountability for Disciplinary Equity

District and school policies provide an opportunity to turn desired outcomes into concrete goals by establishing priorities for staff and for clarifying expectations for students and families. Effective policies can reduce the effects of intentional bias, enable the use of interventions that create an inclusive environment, and reduce the use of discriminatory practices (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Even so, educational

policies do not always align with desired practices or outcomes. For example, a recent nationwide review of 147 district codes of conduct found that nearly three-quarters of the sample failed to include an explicit commitment to equity (Green et al., 2018). A PBIS Center practice guide (*Key Elements of Policies to Address Discipline Disproportionality: A Guide for District and School Teams*; <http://bit.ly/KeyDisproGuide>) describes key elements of policies to address discipline disproportionality and provides a resource for schools looking to review and revise their policies. This guide also provides a number of examples and non-examples of school and district policies. (Green et al., 2015).

For example, one school identified that negative interactions with marginalized students frequently started because of the school dress code. The school worked with students who were impacted the most by the dress code to identify new guidelines for the dress code policy, as well as a procedure to address dress code infractions that would be better received by students. In another example, based on the finding that white students tended to receive referrals for behaviors that are observable and measurable (such as smoking, fighting, and vandalism), while African American students tended to be referred to the office for more subjective behaviors (such as disrespect or disruption), one school worked with a diverse group of stakeholders to identify concrete examples and non-examples for each of the more subjective problem behaviors. The resulting definitions and examples for the subjective infractions included variations of the behavior from each cultural group on cam-

pus and reduced the degree to which staff were influenced by their personal opinions of students' behaviors.

### *5. Teach Strategies for Neutralizing Implicit Bias in Discipline Decisions*

High school leadership teams should use their school-wide data to identify situations (e.g., times, locations, discipline types) that are most prone to bias. Once those situations are identified it is essential to teach all faculty and staff specific strategies to address those situations. For example, staff may work together to create and implement neutralizing routines that allow them to delay making disciplinary decisions until they are able to fully consider the specific elements of the specific situation (McIntosh, Girvan, et al., 2018).

In another school, the team learned that the majority of referrals for African American students were for the infraction of “disrespect.” The school introduced a new step in their discipline process that would be introduced any time a staff member felt a student was “being disrespectful” towards staff: the staff member would simply ask the student if s/he were trying to be disrespectful in that moment. If the student answered “yes,” a referral for disrespect would be written. Most of the time, however, the student answered “no,” and the interaction turned into an opportunity for the student to explain where s/he was “coming from,” and the staff member could then teach the student another way of expressing him/herself in a way that might be better received by adults.

### **Systems to Support Culturally Responsive PBIS in High School Settings**

In order to maximize the impact of the practices we've described strong systems must be in place to support the systematic and sustained implementation. “Systems” refer to the structures and supports district and school leadership teams provide to enhance teachers' implementation of evidence-based practices with fidelity (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2015, October). Simply put, any time educators are asked to implement a new practice, schools have a responsibility to identify how these educators will be supported.

**Train, coach, and reinforce.** Probably the most essential component to supporting implementation of any practice is ensuring that those who are implementing it (a) know exactly what they need to do, (b) are provided support and feedback on how to implement it in their specific context, and (c) are acknowledged for their work. This is particularly true when addressing equity. Many schools have learned that they need to increase training and coaching supports in order to ensure implementation fidelity of culturally responsive practices.

For example, before asking a faculty member to start a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA; or any other equity support group), the school would need to (a) provide sufficient training so that the faculty member feels competent in overseeing the group, (b) provide a way for the person to receive feedback on how they are facilitating

the group and (c) ensure that local guidelines are followed for providing stipends (or other acknowledgement) for their role as a facilitator. In addition, schools need to allocate adequate meeting space, materials, and monetary funds to the group so they may engage in activities related to their mission. This support speaks volumes to staff, students and families that the GSA is fully supported by the school, just as any other extracurricular activity would be.

**Address structural barriers.** Sometimes an adjustment to the master schedule and/or school calendar will be necessary to effectively support a practice. One high school recognized that student/staff relationships had deteriorated due to a long history of disproportionate discipline. To make time to build positive relationships, the school re-purposed their early release day so that students and staff could learn more about each other's interests and hobbies. Every staff member identified two hobbies that they would be willing to share with students, and every student signed up for a special "hobby club" with two staff members. Early release days were split into two periods, allowing students and staff to spend a meaningful amount of time in a mutually enjoyable activity. Students and staff completed the first "hobby day" with an outpouring of positive regard and renewed enthusiasm. Other strategies to find time for new practices include a single-day modified bell schedule, where five minutes are shaved off every class period and then added as a "homeroom" before school, extended time during lunch, or extra time after the last class of the day. During standardized testing, once the tests are complete for

the day, the afternoons could be used for relationship-building activities, social-emotional-behavioral skill instruction, or focus group sessions.

### Conclusion

In summary, the five-point multi-component approach offers valuable direction for creating a safe, supportive and inclusive multi-tiered system. Although teams may be faced with multiple barriers along the way, culturally responsive implementation offers a way to address those challenges by drawing on the strengths and expertise of the communities who will be served. In Florida, 93% of schools that engaged in culturally responsive implementation saw improvements for their target group on at least one equity measure. Beyond the numerical victory, school teams reported a dramatic shift in the way they conceptualized reasons for disproportionality, as well as a new appreciation for the experiences of their marginalized students. Staff, families and students were excited and encouraged by the opportunity to share ideas about their school, and in one district the excitement was so contagious that members of the district Leadership Team carried the idea of focus groups into the larger community setting, eventually recruiting several small business owners as mentors and internship providers for their high school students. The momentum achieved by including and empowering others can be transformational: one student who participated on a student-led PBIS team reported that joining the team has made him feel valued by his school – an outcome that, with continued implementation, could finally reverse decades of inequities.

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