

Focusing on Freshmen: Universal Interventions for Improving Social Skills and School Engagement

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Introductions

Who are we?

Who are you?





Session Outcomes:

- Describe how to deliver universal interventions that are targeted for freshmen success
- Identify the core features of effective social skills and engagement skills programs
- Identify strategies for providing peer support to freshmen

Background

- The transitional nature of 9th grade is an **opportune time** to implement universal interventions to improve social skills and school engagement
 - Unfamiliar social and educational environments.
 - Increased expectations including completing coursework for credits required for graduation (Fulk, 2003).
 - Students have expressed concerns about the social aspect of this transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Wentzel et al., 2019).
- Performance in the 9th grade is **highly predictive of future success** in high school and beyond (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Neild et al., 2008; Roderick, 1993).

9th Grade Outcomes & Student Success

- 9th graders are most vulnerable
 - Less engagement with school
 - Fewer adult and peer relationships
 - More challenging behavior
 - Lower attendance
 - Lower course performance

**Linked to
dropout but
ALTERABLE**

Early Warning Indicators

Figure 9 provides a sample of EWIs currently in use at several large U.S. school districts.

Figure 9: Early Warning Indicators in Use at Selected Major School Districts

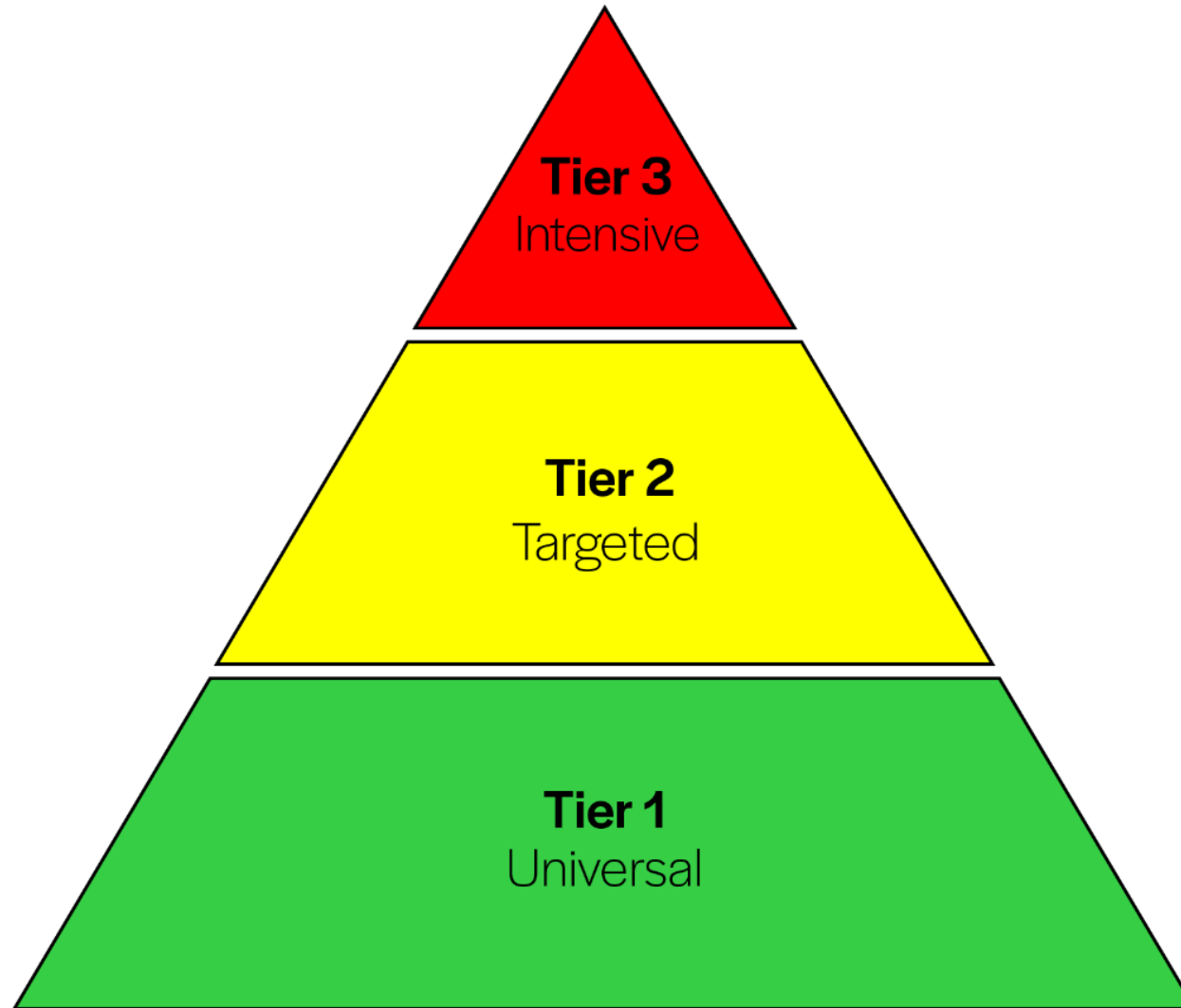
| School District | EWIs |
|--|--|
| Chicago Public Schools | Ninth Grade “On-Track” Indicators: (1) Having one or no semester F grades in core courses; (2) Earning five or more credits freshman year (minimum needed to be promoted to 10th grade) |
| School District of Philadelphia | Eighth Grade Indicators: (1) Attendance less than 80% and/or (2) Failed English or math |
| Portland Public Schools | Focused on “Academic Priority Students” (D or F in a core course in 9 th grade or failing to meet proficiency in “two out of three standards”) and “late entrants” (entered the district in 10th grade or later). |
| Baltimore City Public Schools | Sixth Grade Indicators: (1) Missing 20 or more days of school, (2) Failing English, or math, or both and/or a failing average for English, math, science, and social studies, (3) Being at least one year over-age (suggesting an earlier retention), and (4) Being suspended for three or more days |

Low Academic Engagement and Performance

Absenteeism

Challenging Behavior

Source: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, Stanford University⁷⁰



PBIS in High Schools

- Slower implementation
- Struggle to sustain implementation
- Often less capacity for student support



CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

Pride

- Be a confident and creative thinker
- Allow others their best opportunity to learn
- Go above and beyond expectations
- Honor diversity and show acceptance for others' cultures and beliefs
- Address inequality or students in need with kindness

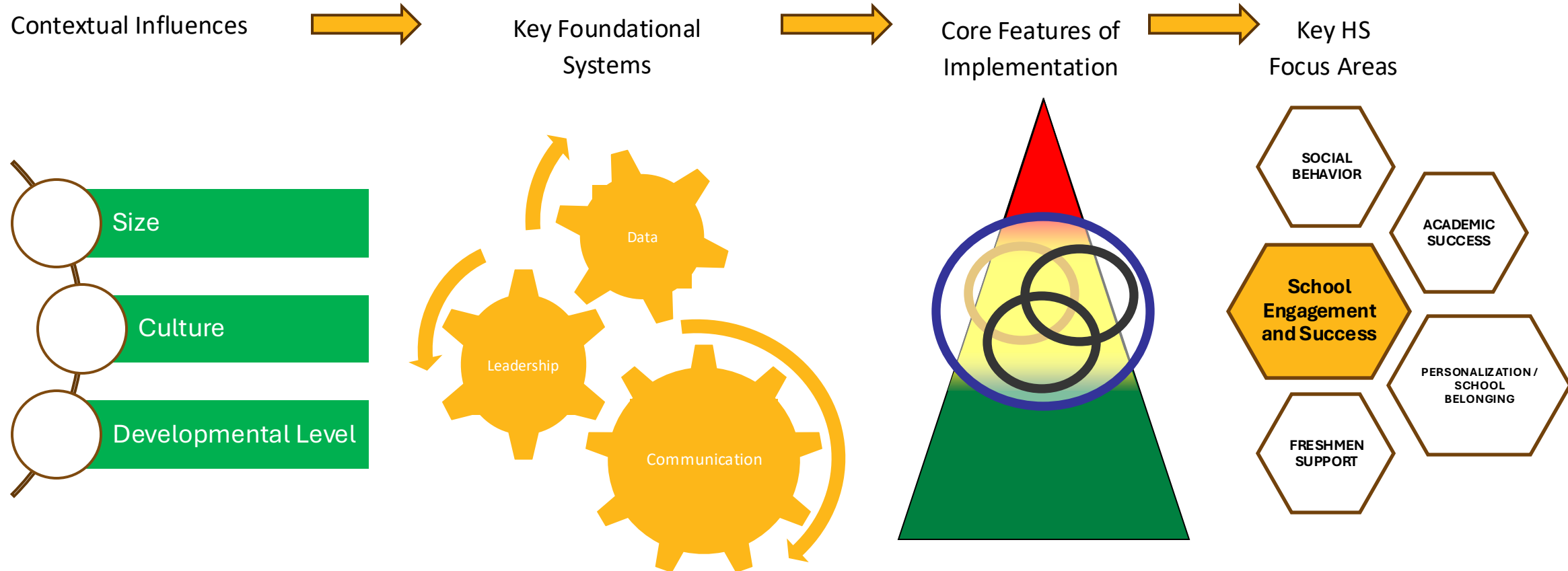
Respect

- Use kind words and actions
- Listen actively and engage in the lesson
- Be accountable for your actions

Responsibility

- Arrive on time with necessary materials
- Participate and contribute to class discussions
- Be accountable for your role in all areas of academics
- Collaborate positively

PBIS in High Schools



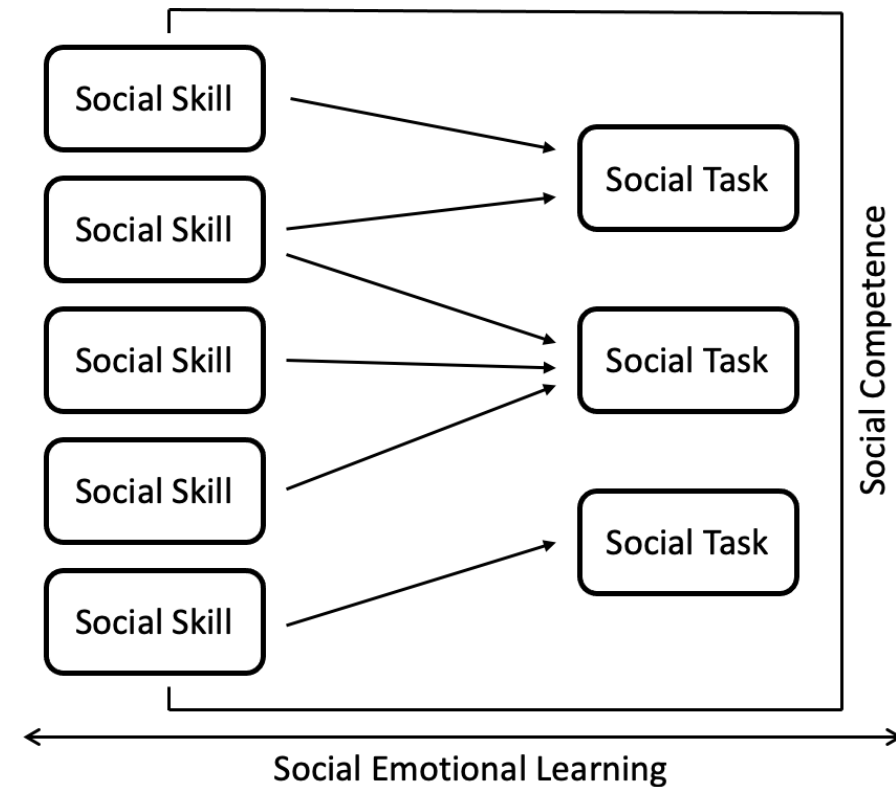
Universal Interventions for Freshmen: Logistics

- Where to implement?
 - Class required solely for freshmen
 - Embedded within content area classes
- When do I implement?
 - Emphasis on start of the school year
 - Continued support throughout school year
- Who should be involved?
 - Tier 1 team

Universal Social Skill Program

What are social skills?

- Social skills are considered **academic enablers**, meaning they have a positive relationship with academic performance (Gresham et al., 2012).
- Unfortunately, social skills are **rarely embedded** into the daily curriculum, or taught through direct instruction universally (Lee, 2011).



Which skills do teachers find important?

Don't need social skills if you have no social life

**BUT learning
is a social
experience!!!**



Skills rated as necessary by all grade level teachers:

- Following directions
- Attending to instructions
- Controlling temper in situations of conflict with peers
- Controlling temper in situations of conflict with adults
- Responding appropriately to physical aggression from peers

(Lane et al., 2003)

Think – Pair – Share

How are social skills addressed at your school currently?

Universal Social Skills: Determining Scope

- Ensure skills are relevant to high school students and teachers
- Sequence lessons to build upon each other

Selecting target skills:

- School/Classroom expectations
- Social Skill Programs
- Student Deficits

| Lesson | Social Skill |
|--------|--|
| 1 | Listening to others |
| 2 | Following steps and expectations |
| 3 | Advocating for oneself |
| 4 | Taking responsibility for your actions |
| 5 | Staying calm with others |
| 6 | Cooperating with peers |
| 7 | Cooperating with teachers |
| 8 | Effective problem solving |

Universal Social Skills: Structuring Lessons

Behavioral Objective: During this lesson, each student will display the verbal (e.g., responding with a comment) and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., looking at the speaker, facing the speaker) that indicate they are listening to others one or more times.

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| Tell | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State objective• Introduction and importance of skill• Define the skill• Outline the steps | Whole class discussion with opportunities to respond throughout (verbal, nonverbal, writing) |
| Show | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model or discuss | Teacher models, students role play, teacher shares examples from their own life |
| Do | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice• Reflect and set a goal | Students practice skill in groups (if applicable), students read scenarios and practice working through skill steps, students reflect and set goal |

Universal Social Skills: Lesson Delivery

- Conversational
- Encourage opinions and diverse perspectives
- Allow time for students to make meaning of skills within their own lives and share with others

Pro Tip: If delivering lessons in a content area class, provide an opportunity to use the skill during a content area activity

"Conflict is when there is a disagreement or an argument, but it can also mean "incompatible" - for example, you may have experienced conflict with a sibling or family member before, but you could also have conflict with yourself if your actions aren't matching your beliefs."

"What are your thoughts on this definition? Would you change it at all?" "

"What are some situations inside of school and outside of school where this skill is important?"

- What typically happens when you're feeling dysregulated? How can you tell?
- Brainstorm some calming supports/strategies. What do you already use? What do you want to try?
- Star the ideas that are appropriate and accessible during school.

Universal Social Skills: Lesson Delivery

Definition

Taking responsibility for your actions can feel easy sometimes and difficult other times.

Taking responsibility for your actions includes owning up to the positive consequences of your choices or behavior and the negative consequences of your choices or behavior. To truly take responsibility for your actions you cannot blame the consequences on external factors or the actions of others.

When taking responsibility of your actions, use the following steps:

1. **Reflect** on your actions.
2. **Recognize** the consequences of your actions.
3. **Acknowledge** your actions and the consequences.
4. **Change (or continue)** your actions.

- Avoid skill steps that are compliance-based (e.g., taking responsibility only for negative actions).
- Short on time? Focus the conversation on the skill within the context of YOUR classroom.
 - “What are actions you have taken responsibility for in this class?”
 - “When taking responsibility for your actions in this class, I expect you to...”

Universal Social Skills: Additional Considerations

Steps for Cooperating with Peers

When cooperating with peers, use the following steps:

1. Determine the **common goal**
2. **Share** your strengths and thoughts related to the goal
3. **Set expectations** (tasks, timeline, etc.)
4. **Complete** your part as planned

Throughout these steps you will also use the other skills we discussed (like listening, taking responsibility, advocating,

Just because a student was taught how to “cooperate” does not mean they know how to cooperate in multiple contexts (e.g., during group work, with peers, with adults)

Explicit steps should apply across multiple settings – then you can provide guidance on using the steps within the context of YOUR classroom!

Steps for Cooperating with Teachers/Adults

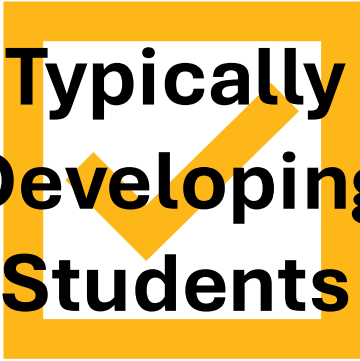
When cooperating with teachers, use the following steps:

1. Determine the **common goal**
2. **Share** your strengths and thoughts related to the goal
3. **Set expectations** (tasks, timeline, etc.)
4. **Complete** your part as planned

How do these steps compare to last week (cooperating with peers)?

Universal Social Skills: Key Findings

- Teaching the eight social skills **increased** teacher report of social skill use for:



**Typically
Developing
Students**



**Students at-
risk for SEB
challenges**

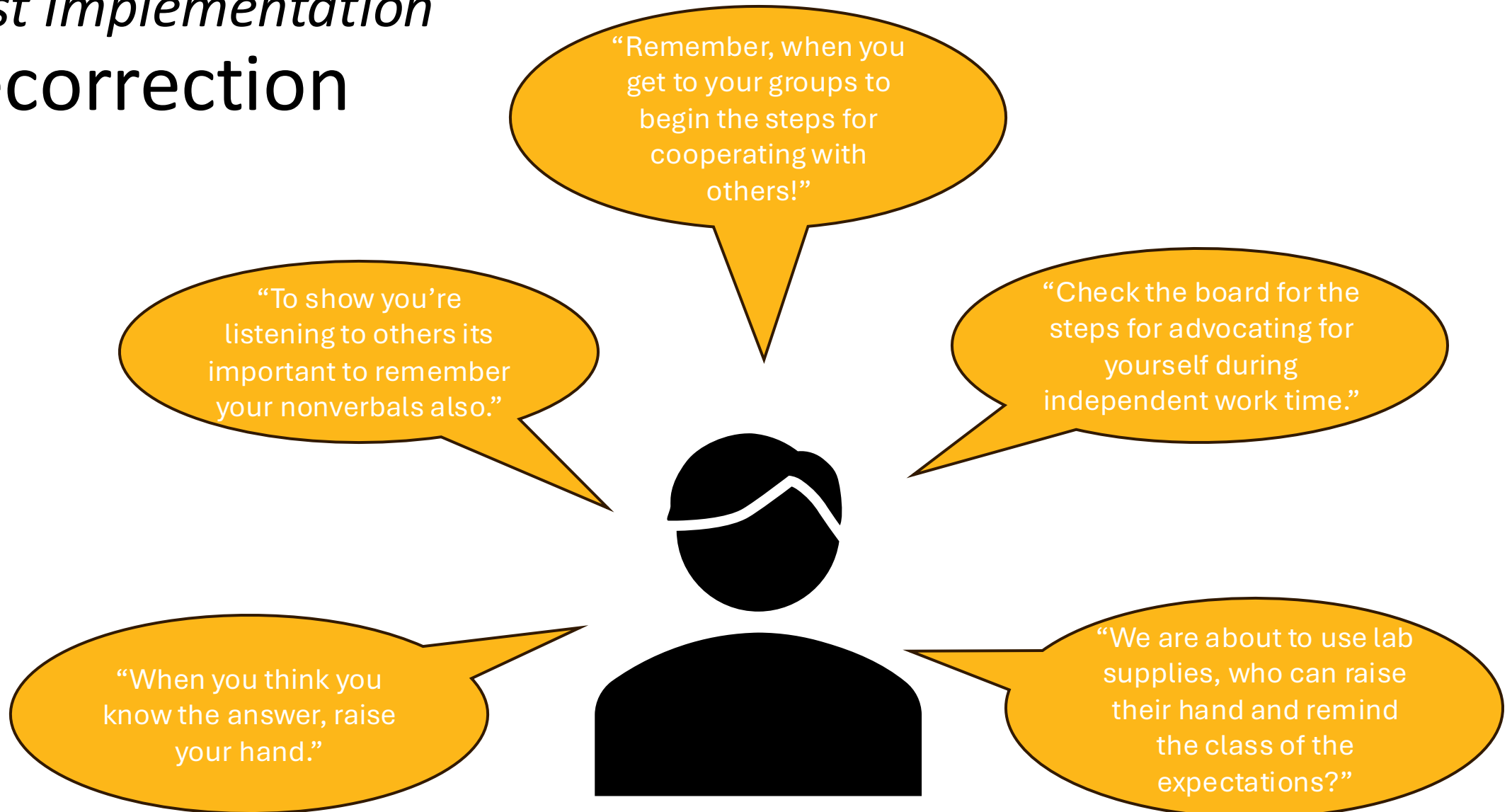


**Students
with
Disabilities**

- Teachers stated the lessons were acceptable, appropriate and feasible.

Boost Implementation

Precorrection





Boost Implementation: Behavior Specific Praise

1. Monitor for wanted behavior
2. Delivering a praise directly connected to the specific behavior

Instead of...

"Good job today"

**This does not
communicate what the
student did to receive
this comment.**

Say this...

*"Good job advocating for
yourself by raising your
hand and asking for help on
a specific question."*

**This communicates what
the student did to receive
this comment.**

Instead of...

“Thank you”

Say this...

“Thank you for working to cooperate with peers. I heard you share your strengths with the group which is helpful for dividing tasks!”

Universal Engagement Skill Program

Think – Pair – Share

What are you doing to support 9th grade engagement and student success in your school?

Freshmen Success

- Freshman Success: Implementation of Comprehensive Universal Supports for School Engagement
- \$1,481,588 Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funded project (R305A150010)
- PI: K. Brigid Flannery
- Focus: Developed and tested the Freshman Success Model, an intervention that includes peer mentors to promote school engagement for all ninth grade students in high schools with SW-PBIS.
- The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute, Office, or the U.S. Department of Education



Tier 1 Strategy: Freshmen Success

Systems

- Embedded into school structure, culture
- Freshmen-wide
- Data-based decision making



Curriculum

- Engagement-focused Content
- Acquisition and Application
- Peer Navigator Support



Peer Support

- Engagement-focused Content
- Acquisition and Application
- Peer Navigator Support

Freshmen Success Implementation Timeline

| | Quarter 1 | Quarter 2 | Quarter 3 | Quarter 4 |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Freshmen Leadership Team | | | | |
| Peer Navigators | | | | |
| Curriculum Delivery | | | | |

Freshmen Success: Systems

- Separate or subteam from school-wide leadership team
- 3-5 team members (counselors, administrator, ect)
 - Regular meetings
 - Roles
 - Facilitator
 - Data analyst
- Monitoring and using 9th grade data for decision making
 - Identify early warning markers:
 - Attendance
 - Behavior
 - Course performance

Freshmen Success: Curriculum

- 14 lessons
 - Behavioral engagement (e.g., prioritize tasks, study plan preparation)
 - Cognitive engagement (e.g., grad requirements, on track for grad)
 - Emotional engagement (e.g., school resources, teacher allies)
- Approximately 45 minutes
- Delivered by teacher & peer navigators
- Front-loaded in year

School Engagement



BEHAVIORAL

- Doing schoolwork
- Positive conduct
- Participation (classwork & extracurricular)

COGNITIVE

- Relevance of school
- Motivation; willingness to apply effort
- Ability to self-regulate

EMOTIONAL

- Sense of belonging
- Connection to school
- Sense of support at school

School Engagement



BEHAVIORAL

GETTING WORK DONE

- Prioritize tasks and develop plans to accomplish them
- Demonstrate study strategies for various test types

COGNITIVE

GETTING TO GRADUATION

- Identify what graduation requirements are and where to locate
- Identify if on track and how get/stay on track for graduation

EMOTIONAL

GETTING CONNECTED

- Identify and practice how to build teacher allies
- Identify school resources and supports

Example Lesson: Being on Track to Graduation

- I can graduate in 4 yrs, because there are 32 opportunities to earn 24 credits.
- I know where to find the district's graduation requirements list
- I know how many credits I need to earn this year to be on-track for an on time graduation.

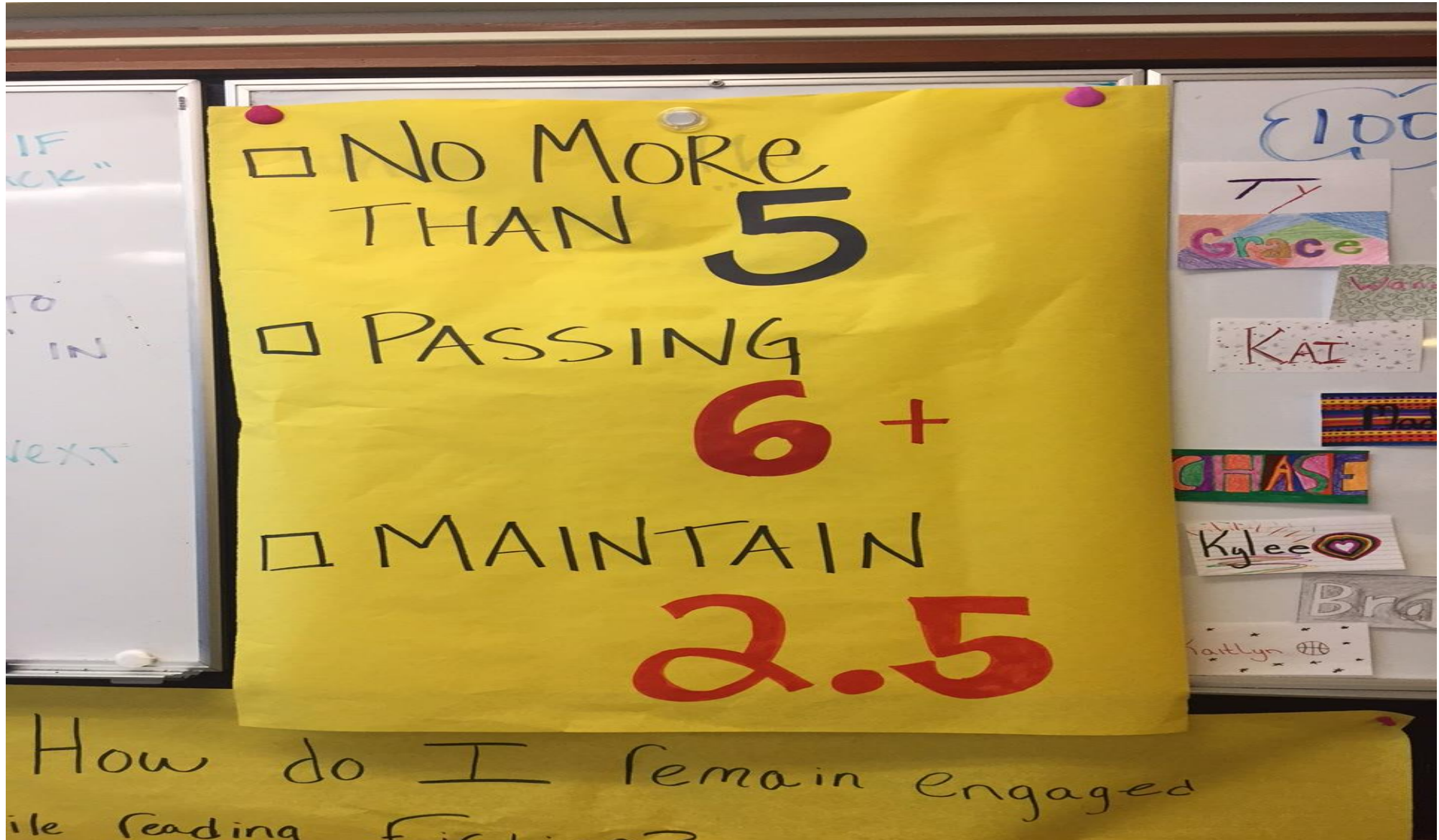
Semester class = 0.5 credit

Fine Arts Credits include:

| | | |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| • 2nd Language | • Shop | • Theater |
| • Art | • Music | • Business |
| | • Child Dev. | • Cooking, etc., |

Electives are:

Any class in any content area
over the requirement



| Freshman Year | | Sophomore Year | | Junior Year | | Senior Year | |
|----------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| English 9 | English 9 | English 10 | English 10 | English 11 | English 11 | English 12 | English 12 |
| PE | Health | Prep. for Adult Living | Rec Games | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective |
| Global Studies | Fresh. Focus | US Government | Global Realities | Foundational America | Modern America | Economics | Elective |
| Science 9 | Science 9 | Biology | Biology | Chemistry | Chemistry | Physics | Physics |
| Algebra 1 | Algebra 1 | Geometry | Geometry | Algebra 2/Trig | Algebra 2/Trig | Pre-Calc. CN | Pre-Calc. CN |
| FLT | FLT | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective |
| Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective |
| Fine Art | Fine Art | Foreign Language | Foreign Language | Foreign Language | Foreign Language | Elective | Elective |

Freshmen Focus Groups: Freshmen Content



Lessons found most helpful:

1. Getting involved in school activities
2. Prioritizing work: Rock, pebble, and water
3. Communicating with teachers
4. Study strategies (i.e., concept map, flash cards, self-test)
5. Making sense of transcripts



Lessons boosters provided as needed:

- Behavioral engagement (e.g., prioritize tasks, study plan preparation)
- Cognitive engagement (e.g., grad requirements, on track for grad)
- Emotional engagement (e.g., school resources, teacher allies)

Peer Support

Peer Mentoring Programs

- Research Report – Maxwell, Price, & Sunmonu., 2014 & Kruger, E., 2010
 - Helps ease eight-to-ninth grade transition process, encourages student engagement
 - Research reviewed by the National Dropout Prevention Center indicates strong evidence of effectiveness on student academic success

**Monthly academic
and emotional
guidance check-ins**

**Quarterly School-
Year Social
Activities**

**Freshmen
Orientation Day**

**Informal
Communications**

Freshmen Success: Peer Support

- Focused on showing students “how to do school” with modeling and coaching
- Teach portions on lessons
- Participate in small group interactions
- Help with technology
- Take fidelity checks

Peer Navigator Tasks

Daily Roles

- Assist students when needed
- Teach portions of the lesson
- Planner checks
- Assignment checks
- Small group interaction
- Help with technology (Google, synergy)
- Take notes
- Collect exit slips
- Other tasks assigned
- Tutors

Weekly Roles

- Planner/binder checks
- Create models of high-quality work
- Group check-in
- Complete PN feedback forms
- PN Caseload Checklist

Freshmen Focus Groups: Peer Navigators

*Really helped
me with my
home*

*Talked about
how to stay
on-track and
graduate*

*Sometimes
easier to talk
to my peer
navigator
than teacher*



*He just sat in
corner and
graded
homework*

*Ours would
come up to us
in class and
explained the
assignments to
us*

*Ours helped
the teacher
with activities
in class*

Takeaways from Including Peer Support

- Need to be actively involved
- Teachers may need to select the upperclassmen
 - Choose someone who the teacher has rapport with, can good example, has good grades and transcripts
- Need to have strong leadership skills, outgoing, and willing to talk to ninth-graders about their experiences

Think – Pair – Share

How does your high school utilize its student leaders?

What groups of student leaders do you have in place how might you utilize them to support freshmen?

Randomized Controlled Trial of Freshmen Success

- Settings and participants
 - 2 high schools in treatment; 2 in control condition
- Procedures
 - Leadership recruited/ trained before school year
 - Teams received 8-hr training
- FS curriculum implemented in fall semester
 - Teachers participated in 4-hr training
- Peer navigators recruited/trained before school year
 - 2-hr training fall semester

Key Findings

- Medium-to-large effects:
 - Credits earned in 2nd semester
- Small effects:
 - Student attendance
 - Motivation
 - Engagement

A Tier 1 Intervention to Increase Ninth Grade Engagement and Success: Results From a Randomized Controlled Trial

K. Brigid Flannery, Mimi McGrath Kato, Angus Kittelman, Kent McIntosh, and Danielle Triplett
University of Oregon

Although high school graduation rates are improving, many students are still not successful. Research has documented that 9th grade is a pivotal year in determining whether a student will graduate or drop out. The purpose of this randomized controlled trial was to assess the effects of a Tier 1 intervention model (freshmen success) for 9th grade students to increase school engagement, attendance, credits earned, and grade point average (GPA). This study included 1,588 students in ninth grade across 4 comprehensive high schools. Treatment schools implemented the freshmen success components: a 9th grade leadership team, a curriculum, and support from peer navigators. Control schools continued business as usual. Results showed statistically significant and educationally meaningful effects on student motivation, engagement and attendance, and a moderate-to-large effect for credits earned. However, there was no significant effect found for GPA.

Impact and Implications

This study demonstrates that the freshman success model, when implemented with fidelity, increased 9th grade student engagement, attendance, and credits earned. However, the intervention was not associated with significant improvements in grade point average.

Keywords: high school, attendance, school engagement, prevention

Although graduation rates are improving nationally, too many students still do not complete high school. School dropouts, when compared with their graduating peers, are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, live in poverty, have poor health, and become involved in criminal activities (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; McFarland, Cui, & Stark, 2018). Research has documented that the path to dropping out is a gradual process of diminishing school engagement (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) and, for many, begins with the transition from middle to high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Benner, 2011; Somers & Garcia, 2016). In particular, ninth graders have been shown to have lower attendance rates (Jerald, 2006), higher rates of disciplinary action (Flannery, Fenning, McGrath Kato, & Bohanon, 2013; Kaufman et al., 2010; Spaulding et al., 2010), and lower course performance (Allensworth & Easton,

2007; Roderick, Kelley-Kemple, Johnson, & Beechum, 2014) than their older peers. In fact, Allensworth and Easton (2007) found that students who fell behind in ninth grade had a graduation rate that was 60% lower than that of students who were able to stay on track during the ninth grade year.

To prevent high school dropout, a growing body of research supports the implementation of multitiered systems of support (MTSS) to foster student engagement, positive social interactions, and academic achievement for all students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Goss & Andren, 2014). MTSS provides a framework for schools to implement evidence-based interventions as they supply (1) systems needed for initial and sustained implementation, (2) guidance in the selection and implementation of practices that match the needs of the school, and (3) systems for using data to identify areas of concern and guide decision-making regarding interventions (Ervin, Schaughency, Matthews, Goodman, & McGlinchey, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2009). This continuum of supports begins with the whole school and becomes more intensive and individualized based on student need. Tier 1 (i.e., universal, schoolwide) emphasizes prevention and is designed for all students, adults, and school contexts. The Tier 2 (i.e., targeted) consists of efficient interventions offered to groups of students who need additional support. Finally, Tier 3 (i.e., individualized) provides the highest need students with intensive supports (see www.pbis.org). These preventive models have been shown to be successful in high schools by reducing problem behavior, increasing attendance, and improving student access to needed interventions (Bohanon et al., 2006; Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh,

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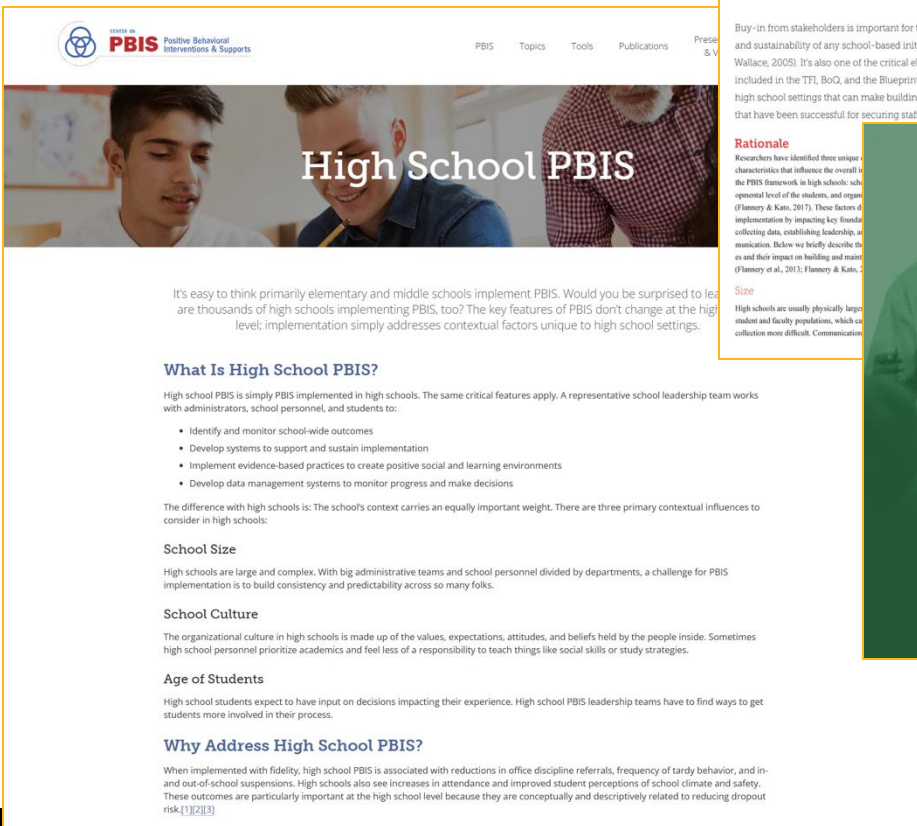
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to K. Brigid Flannery, Department of Educational and Community Supports, University of Oregon, 1235 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403. E-mail: brigidf@uoregon.edu



Summary

- Universal interventions targeting freshmen can address alterable variables associated with student dropout
- Social skills and school engagement interventions can be integrated and delivered within a Tier 1 SW-PBIS framework
- Peers can be powerful interventionists to support freshmen students

Resources



High School PBIS

It's easy to think primarily elementary and middle schools implement PBIS. Would you be surprised to learn that thousands of high schools are implementing PBIS, too? The key features of PBIS don't change at the high school level; implementation simply addresses contextual factors unique to high school settings.

What Is High School PBIS?

High school PBIS is simply PBIS implemented in high schools. The same critical features apply. A representative school leadership team works with administrators, school personnel, and students to:

- Identify and monitor school-wide outcomes
- Develop systems to support and sustain implementation
- Implement evidence-based practices to create positive social and learning environments
- Develop data management systems to monitor progress and make decisions

The difference with high schools is: The school's context carries an equally important weight. There are three primary contextual influences to consider in high schools:

School Size

High schools are large and complex. With big administrative teams and school personnel divided by departments, a challenge for PBIS implementation is to build consistency and predictability across so many folks.

School Culture

The organizational culture in high schools is made up of the values, expectations, attitudes, and beliefs held by the people inside. Sometimes high school personnel prioritize academics and feel less of a responsibility to teach things like social skills or study strategies.

Age of Students

High school students expect to have input on decisions impacting their experience. High school PBIS leadership teams have to find ways to get students more involved in their process.

Why Address High School PBIS?

When implemented with fidelity, high school PBIS is associated with reductions in office discipline referrals, frequency of tardy behavior, and in- and out-of-school suspensions. High schools also see increases in attendance and improved student perceptions of school climate and safety. These outcomes are particularly important at the high school level because they are conceptually and descriptively related to reducing dropout risk.^{[1][2][3]}



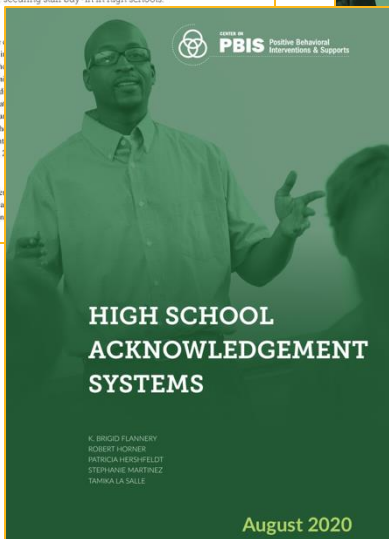
High School PBIS Implementation: Staff Buy-In

Stephanie Martinez, Laura Kern, Brigid Flannery, Ashley White, Jen Freeman & Heather Peshak George

Buy-in from stakeholders is important for the successful adoption, full implementation and sustainability of any school-based initiative (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). It's also one of the critical elements for implementation of Tier 1 PBIS included in the TFI, BoQ, and the Blueprint. This brief describes the unique features of high school settings that can make building buy-in more difficult and identifies strategies that have been successful for securing staff buy-in in high schools.

Rationale
Researchers have identified three unique characteristics that influence the overall fit of the PBIS framework in high schools: school personnel level of the students, and organization (Flannery & Kato, 2017). These factors drive implementation by impacting key foundational elements: collecting data, establishing leadership, and communication. Below we briefly describe these factors and their impact on building and maintaining PBIS in high schools (Flannery et al., 2013; Flannery & Kato, 2017).

Size
High schools are usually physically large and have large student and faculty populations, which can make implementation more difficult. Communication



High School PBIS Acknowledgement Systems

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High School PBIS Implementation: Student Voice

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<https://bit.ly/RTBmag>

Thank you!



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