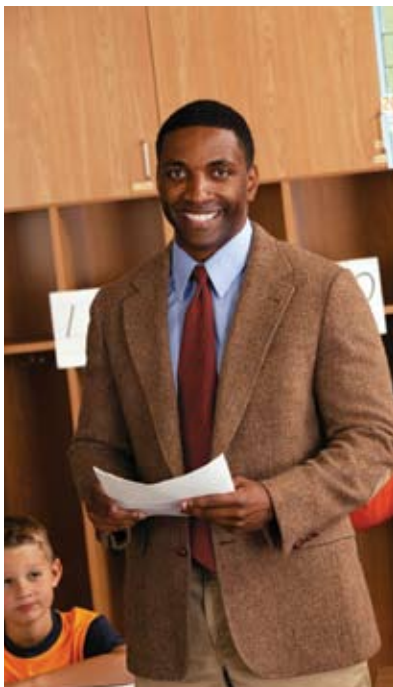




National Center for Mental Health Promotion  
and Youth Violence Prevention

# Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports Brief





## ||||| Purpose of this Guide

School districts around the nation have begun to implement evidence-based programs to reduce school violence, drug abuse, and bullying in an effort to create safe and supportive educational environments. Orderly and safe school climates not only positively impact students' academic achievement but can also contribute to improved attitudes and behavior.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to promote safe and healthy school environments, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been identified by the U.S. Department of Education as an important approach to identifying and organizing effective school practices in community, family, classroom, and individual contexts.<sup>2</sup> The Department of Education established the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)), a national center focusing on training, dissemination, and technical assistance, which currently provides support to a network of more than 5,000 schools.

# Part I: Introduction to PBIS

## What is PBIS?

PBIS is a system-wide approach to preventing and improving problem behaviors in classrooms and schools. PBIS does not single out “problem students” for punishment, but rather involves the entire school population in promoting and rewarding positive behaviors, while preventing negative or risky behaviors, in order to create a safe, supportive learning environment for all. PBIS does not simply seek to “fix” a problem; it also addresses the circumstances that led to the problem behavior, and creates sustained positive change in the school environment.

PBIS encourages students to treat themselves and others with respect by adhering to simple expectations for behavior that even the youngest student can understand and carry out with support—for example:

- Be respectful.
- Be responsible.
- Follow directions.
- Keep hands and feet to one’s self.
- Be there and be ready.

These school-wide expectations and behaviors are taught as part of the PBIS curriculum.

The PBIS framework accepts that successful student functioning in all environments requires a set of behavioral skills that require instruction, reinforcement, and practice, just like reading, math, or science. Similar to academic instruction, school-wide PBIS provides a useful strategy to prevent school violence, alcohol and drug use, and disruptive behaviors.

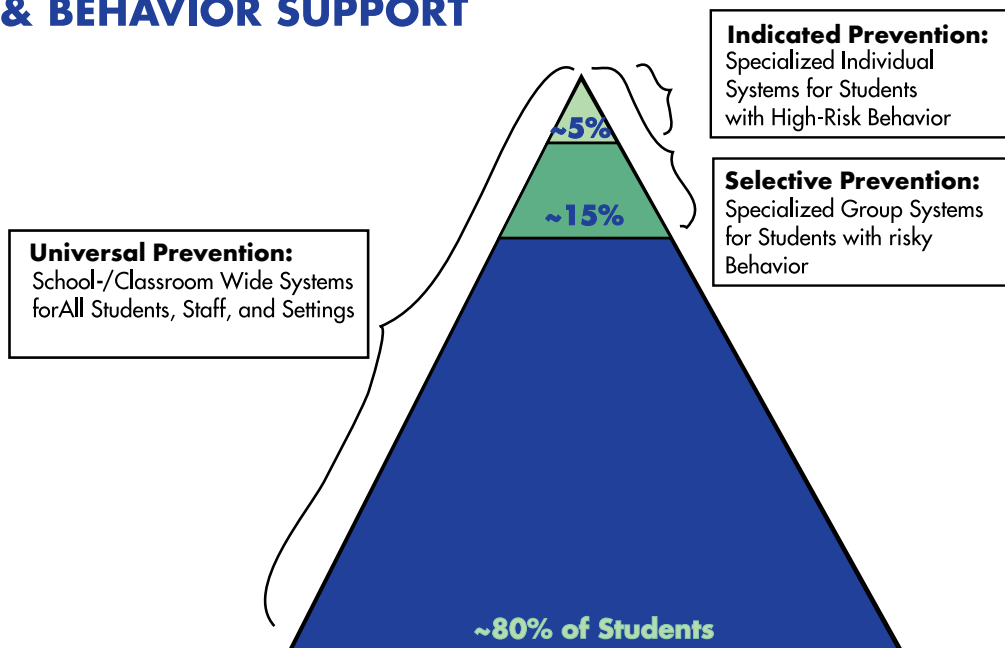
The PBIS approach employs prevention at each of three levels: **universal**, **selective**, and **indicated** [please note that some people (including the Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) who do PBIS often call these interventions primary, secondary and tertiary prevention].

**Universal prevention** focuses on all students, staff, and settings within a school. **Selective prevention** is devoted to prevention for a specialized group of at-risk students, who typically constitute 15% of the school population. The final and most specialized level is **indicated prevention**, which focuses on those students with the greatest need for behavior modification. Prevention strategies for this high-risk group include specialized and individualized plans.

The purpose of this guide is to provide Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) grant recipients with an overview of PBIS, what it can do for their schools and communities, and the steps involved in implementation.

A key goal of PBIS is to reduce the need for more intensive interventions for students whose behavior, without interventions, could easily escalate to a higher level.

## CONTINUUM OF SCHOOL-WIDE INSTRUCTIONAL & BEHAVIOR SUPPORT



### PBIS Theoretical Underpinnings

PBIS is based on three theories and/or movements:

- *Applied Behavior Analysis* investigates the motivation for specific undesirable behaviors, and encourages an approach that values personalized intervention-planning to promote positive behavior change.
- *The Normalization/Inclusion Movement* promotes the rights of individuals with behavior disorders or disabilities to be included in the same living or education facilities and given the same educational and social opportunities as those of individuals with no disabilities.
- *Person-Centered Values* focus on interventions that meet the unique goals and challenges of each individual, including setting goals, commanding respect from others, and thinking independently about one's choices.

As a result of PBIS, "teachers are recognizing positive behaviors and utilizing more alternative models of monitoring student behavior."

— SS/HS Project Director Bakersfield, California

### What PBIS Can Do for Schools and School Districts

Many schools and districts across the country are having success with PBIS and are seeing benefits, such as the following:

- Drops in suspension rates
- A more positive school climate
- Decreases in classroom disruptions

These changes do not occur overnight. Change at this level requires an investment of time and resources; training in all three prevention levels usually spans 12–18 months. Is it worth the investment?



Recent study outcomes indicate that:

- Many factors can account for student academic performance on standardized achievement tests. Emerging research suggests that disruptive student behavior typically results in a loss of instruction time. Interventions that keep students on track in the classroom should therefore lead to improvement in academic performance. In fact, new data suggest that there is a relationship between school-wide PBIS and improved academic performance.
- Interventions that reduce disciplinary referrals to administrators allow for greater time to devote to training and supervision.<sup>3</sup>
- Schools that have implemented PBIS are experiencing reductions in disciplinary incidents, and increases in instructional time. Students also learn skills for managing their own behavior and self-monitoring.<sup>4</sup>
- Because PBIS is a framework for implementing various levels of prevention, it can act as scaffolding that supports all other school-based initiatives.

## How to Implement PBIS

### *Build School Support*

PBIS impacts the entire school environment, teaching new skills to students, teachers, and staff. In-school coaches help translate PBIS training into daily practice and provide support. External coaches often provide consistent infrastructure and training across a district, region, or state. The National Technical Assistance Center on PBIS is a resource for information on training and staff development.

In order for PBIS to be successful, the program must have school-wide support. It is recommended that at least 80% of the staff be supportive of its implementation. A leadership team usually consisting of representatives from administration, teaching staff, and support personnel can guide buy-in efforts. In many schools, this team may also include a parent and a mental health provider from an outside agency.

### *Seven Major Components of Effective Implementation*

Implementation of PBIS in a school or district requires system-wide change. All effective school-wide systems change includes seven major components:

1. An agreed upon and common approach to discipline
2. A positive statement of purpose
3. Positively stated expectations for all students and staff
4. Procedures to teach these expectations to students
5. A continuum of procedures to encourage and sustain these expectations
6. A continuum of procedures to discourage rule-violating behavior
7. Procedures to monitor and evaluate the discipline system on a regular and frequent basis

### *Implementing the Three Levels of Prevention*

The three-level approach of PBIS meets both the general needs of the entire school population and the specific needs of at-risk students.

## *Universal Prevention*

Universal prevention reduces new cases of problem behavior by implementing consistent behavior expectations for all students. This is accomplished by integrating positive behavior supports—rules, routines, and physical arrangements—that are developed and taught by school staff to prevent initial problem behavior. A simple rule, such as “Be there and be ready,” teaches students to be on time to class and prepared to learn. Staff can support students in meeting this goal by creating consistent routines and by praising or rewarding students who follow this rule. Research indicates that approximately 80% of behavior problems can be avoided with the effective implementation of universal prevention.

**Examples of Universal Prevention Activities** include the posting of school rules and expectations, a buddy program for new students, substance abuse education, support for transitions, a social skills curriculum integrated into major subject content, peer mediation, choosing a “student of the week,” peer tutors, community volunteers, good communication with families and community agencies, and homework clubs. In addition, teachers define, teach, monitor, and acknowledge the expected behavior; correct behavioral errors (on a continuum of consequences); and use feedback for decision-making.

## *Selective Prevention*

Selective prevention targets a smaller percentage of the student population than universal prevention. This strategy provides intensive or targeted interventions to support students who are at risk for problem behavior, but who do not respond to universal prevention efforts and do not require high-intensity intervention. Experience shows that selective prevention tends to be more successful when it is approached as a collaborative effort among school staff, rather than as “expert driven.”

Examples of selective interventions include social skills clubs (such as “Lunch Bunch” and “Friendship Group”), check-in/check-out procedures, and specialized education plans.

**Examples of Selective Prevention Activities** include buddy programs for new students, peer mediation, peer tutors, scheduled communication with families and community agencies, clearly defined expectations for both students and teachers, small-group activities, support groups, behavioral support plans, behavioral support centers, after-school programs, and dropout re-entry programs.

The “planning center” model was developed in schools to support children and families. These centers facilitate the early identification of, and interventions for, problems that students are having. Staff can then work with students to teach them coping and problem-solving skills to manage their difficulties. These centers also prevent the escalation of inappropriate behaviors by addressing academic, emotional, and behavioral problems before they become crises.<sup>9</sup>

## *Linking PBIS and Systems of Care*

“Systems of care,” a concept developed through the federal Child and Adolescent Service System Program in the 1980s, is defined as a comprehensive spectrum of mental health and other support services, organized into a coordinated network to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances, and their families. The creation of these systems involves a multi-agency, public/private approach to delivering services; an array of service options; and the flexibility to meet the full range of needs of children, adolescents, and their families. The system of care should be child-centered, family-focused, and community-based.



Many state, county, and local educational initiatives, in their work to build a coordinated network of mental health services for children and families, have seen the benefit of combining PBIS and systems of care as a framework for systems change in schools. This combination has recently been documented in a publication from the Bazelon Center for Mental Health, titled *Way to Go: School Success for Children with Mental Health Care Needs* (2006).

### *Indicated Prevention*

Indicated prevention, the most specialized level of PBIS, reduces the complications, intensity, and severity of recurrent negative behaviors. Individualized interventions on this level involve a small number of students with the most severe patterns of problem behaviors; students with social, emotional, or learning difficulties; and even students with no diagnostic label who exhibit behaviors that are dangerous and/or highly disruptive. Indicated prevention is most effective when there are already universal and selective prevention strategies in place. The behavioral support team should comprise teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents who know the child best and who can promote positive change tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the child.<sup>10</sup>

**Examples of indicated interventions** include home-based services; respite care; individual, group, or family therapy; therapeutic foster care; crisis intervention; intensive after-school programs; in-school aides; after-school behavioral support; flexible school days; flexible programming (such as a half day in public school and a half day in a day treatment program); and transportation aides.

Planning centers are also a resource for students at this level. These centers provide a space and the trained personnel to appropriately deal with the intensive needs of the student or family for a few hours or up to several days, if necessary. The centers can meet “crisis” needs as well, assessing a situation for safety, appropriateness, and what support is needed.

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**The “Wraparound” process provides care for children and families** at the individual level and involves the implementation of a community-level collaboration of services and supports, often called a “system of care.” The wraparound process involves setting a plan for the child and family that results in a combination of services and supports that are individualized and meet the child’s and family’s needs. Students at this “targeted” level are frequently involved in multiple service systems.

## Part II: Linking PBIS and the Six Essential Elements of SS/HS

Children and youth should receive services that are integrated into and linked with child-serving agencies and programs with mechanisms for planning, developing, and coordinating services. As SS/HS sites address the six essential elements for safe schools and healthy students, the coordination and integration of PBIS directly supports that work.

SS/HS Six Elements <sup>8</sup>	Relation to PBIS Principles
A safe school environment: Improve campus safety, increase security equipment and personnel, create crisis management teams, monitor enforcement, and complete comprehensive safety reviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A basic element of PBIS is to create safer school environments by decreasing disruptive student behavior, such as disruptive talking, aggression, or vandalism.</li> <li>• PBIS also calls for creating Crisis Management Teams to address the problem behaviors of at-risk students.</li> </ul>
Alcohol and other drug use prevention, violence prevention, and early intervention programs: Offer drug and alcohol prevention programs, prevent violence among students, address tobacco use, increase positive peer pressure, and provide character education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing positive peer pressure and implementing character development programs coincide with the PBIS aim of rewarding positive actions rather than focusing on negative actions.</li> </ul>
School and community mental health preventive and treatment/intervention services: Address the social and emotional development of students by establishing such services as early intervention for at-risk students and families, screening, evaluation, intervention and treatment services for students and families, referral to community providers, consultation for district staff, and training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBIS is compatible with interventions aimed at preventing high-risk behavior while still promoting and maintaining an effective learning environment for all students. PBIS also encourages keeping accurate data on problem behaviors, disciplinary actions and outcomes, and evaluation of positive behavior interventions.</li> <li>• The PBIS approach of connecting with outside agencies to provide more intensive services allows students to remain in a less restrictive environment.</li> </ul>
Early childhood psychosocial and emotional development services: Provide support to high-risk families, young children not yet in school, and pregnant teenagers by working with community partners to improve access to medical care and other services, providing encouragement and support around parenting and child development, and addressing social issues related to the specific risk factors of these groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBIS can help support approaches aimed at integrating high-risk youth into normal classroom instruction while still addressing their specific learning or mental health needs by developing an individualized plan with targeted strategies. This objective is an example of tertiary prevention with targeted strategies. This objective is an example of tertiary prevention.</li> </ul>
Supporting and connecting schools and communities: Focus on improving attendance, participation, and instruction of students; upgrade some or all of the technology equipment for school sites; provide training for staff on managing behavioral problems; use truancy officers as needed; involve parents; and develop a mentoring program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By implementing PBIS in a school or district, teachers will have access to an infrastructure of tools and methods for managing the behavioral problems of students, whether the problems are related to the classroom as a whole or are individual issues.</li> <li>• The connection to other community agencies to support students and families becomes an integral part of the PBIS framework.</li> </ul>
Safe school policies: Develop and promote policies that address a variety of issues (e.g., drugs, guns, alcohol, attendance) to improve school safety within the district, review current policies and procedures, work toward enforcement of policies, and work with students within the juvenile justice system to meet their educational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fundamental objective of PBIS is to ensure a safe school environment for all students—one in which learning can occur.</li> </ul>



## Part III: Lessons Learned from SS/HS Sites Using PBIS

### How SS/HS Sites Are Currently Using PBIS

#### *SS/HS Sites Using PBIS*

Many SS/HS sites across the country already integrate PBIS into their school system. SS/HS sites are primarily implementing PBIS in elementary and middle schools, but a few sites are implementing PBIS at the high school level. The populations being served by these sites are diverse and include both rural and urban school districts. In some communities, PBIS has also been implemented in early childhood centers, preschools, charter schools, juvenile detention centers, and alternative education and day treatment programs.

**"The staff have taken to working with one another in a positive way and have been models for the students' behaviors."**

**— SS/HS Project Director Bergen County**

#### **These sites come from a variety of different regions, with diverse student bodies including:**

- Napa County Office of Education, California
- Wilmington–New Hanover County Schools, North Carolina
- Hartford Public Schools, Connecticut
- Miami-Dade County, Florida
- Somerset County, Maryland
- Bergen County Technical Schools District, New Jersey
- Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District, Alaska
- Hillsboro School District 1J, Oregon
- Worcester Public Schools, Massachusetts

#### *The Impact PBIS Has on School Climate in SS/HS Sites*

One of the fundamental aims of PBIS is to prevent violence and substance abuse among young people. Within the school system, acts of violence are most typically punished by suspensions, which take the student away from the learning environment. PBIS seeks to reduce the number of both in-school and out-of-school suspensions by preventing disruptive behaviors before they occur.

Many of the SS/HS sites currently implementing PBIS have seen a marked improvement in their school climate as it relates to student behavior, evidenced by a decrease in office referrals and suspensions. In addition, school district staff have noted that PBIS implementation has had an overall positive effect on school climate by improving the positive interactions among staff, which provides an excellent model for students to follow. Staff have also observed that PBIS implementation has been an effective way to improve the most "irritating and disruptive behaviors."<sup>12</sup> School climate has also been improved by the increase in consistency of reinforcement and the focus on positive behaviors.

#### *Training and Implementation Processes Used*

SS/HS sites that have implemented PBIS have used a variety of methods to train staff and integrate the initiative into the school setting. These methods range from training staff at regional meetings to bringing in consultants to the school setting to train staff during teacher staff development. Some sites have developed training modules that take place over the course of a school year. Staff from one site

were chosen to receive PBIS training as a team; the team then trained the other teachers and oversaw the implementation of PBIS on a school-wide level.

Ultimately, implementation and training decisions depend on the unique needs and challenges of the school district. Implementation and training should be planned and organized to best capitalize on the strengths of an individual site while also addressing challenges that will likely be faced in the future.

### *Available Funding*

School districts have used a variety of funding sources for training, support for, and implementation of PBIS, including IDEA, Part B discretionary funds, and Title I of the NCLB Act. Other sources include dropout prevention funds, literacy funds, safe and drug-free school funds, mental health integration grants, and character education funds. SS/HS sites have also partnered with mental health or juvenile justice to share the responsibility for PBIS training and support. Expenses generally include the costs of substitutes for the staff who participate in training, compensating the team members who meet on a regular basis, and ongoing coaching fees.

### **Successes**

SS/HS sites that have implemented PBIS are seeing improvements in their overall school climate and a reduction in disruptive behaviors. PBIS has also improved cooperation among staff, shifted staff focus from intervention to prevention, and provided an environment for students that is conducive to learning and to finding alternative solutions to problems.

### **Challenges**

While many sites have seen positive changes as a result of PBIS implementation, they have also encountered challenges, which can be used as “lessons learned” when implementing a PBIS initiative. Most SS/HS sites were in the initial stages of implementation, so the challenges centered on start-up, in particular, securing buy-in from upper-level administration. Research shows that successful prevention programs require strong support from school principals and superintendents. School administrators are crucial and can aid staff buy-in by making resources and personal time available. Other challenges included obtaining funding for a PBIS coordinator, attracting and retaining volunteers, addressing and meeting the needs of a very diverse school district, integrating new programs into the schedule, and coming up with relevant and innovative program content to ensure that students were fully engaged. While these challenges are all valid problems that come with the implementation of a new program in any school, they are also problems that can be overcome.

**“They [teachers] are seeing a decrease in problem behaviors, an increase in use of consistent language [and] acknowledging positive behavior, [and] consistency in reinforcing positive behaviors and in correction of problem behaviors. There is more celebration of positives.”**

**—SS/HS Project Director Hillsboro School District**

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