The connections between education and health

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework is an example of an evidence-based strategy with both education and health benefits. The second and third policy briefs in HPIO’s four-part education and health series describe the importance of student mental health services and supports and school-based social-emotional learning, respectively. Both can be more effectively implemented when combined with PBIS. This fact sheet provides additional detail on PBIS and how it works.

What is PBIS?

PBIS is based on the idea that children can be taught how to behave appropriately, similar to how they are taught mathematics or science. Instead of reactionary discipline policies, PBIS is a comprehensive, proactive approach to improving academic and social outcomes for all students, while preventing problem behaviors. It is a decision-making framework for selecting, organizing and implementing evidence-informed behavioral supports and interventions in a school community. Recognizing that interventions will not have the same effects on all students, the PBIS framework is comprised of three tiers of interventions and supports which correlate with level of student need (see figure 1). PBIS implementation looks different in every school.

Effective schoolwide implementation of PBIS can create a positive and safe school culture and climate for all students and staff. It can decrease behavioral disruptions, thereby increasing instructional time and reducing the need for disciplinary actions such as office referrals and suspensions. However, appropriate structures and processes must be in place to support effective implementation of PBIS and achieve these outcomes.

There is strong research evidence that universal PBIS, which refers to strategies implemented schoolwide, improves behavior in school-age children. Studies have also found that universal PBIS:

- Increases academic achievement
- Improves school climate
- Improves social-emotional skills
- Reduces bullying

How does PBIS work?

Problem-solving through data-based decision making

A schoolwide leadership or behavioral support team guides the process of developing and implementing the school’s PBIS framework. The team is usually comprised of an administrator, grade level representatives, support staff, and external experts. The team uses data to identify and address problem behaviors, and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

Figure 1. Three tiers of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

- **Tier 1** Universal interventions for ALL students
- **Tier 2** Targeted interventions for SOME students (10%-15%)
- **Tier 3** Intensive interventions for a FEW students (1%-5%)

**Goals**

- **Tier 1**: Prevent the development of new occurrences of problem behaviors by implementing high-quality learning environments for all students and staff across all settings (i.e., schoolwide, classroom and non-classroom).
- **Tier 2**: Reduce the frequency and intensity of problem behaviors for students who are not responsive to universal interventions by providing more focused, intensive and frequent interventions (often in a small group setting).
- **Tier 3**: Reduce the intensity, frequency and/or complexity of existing problem behaviors that are resistant to and/or unlikely to be addressed by Tier 1 and 2 prevention efforts by providing more individualized interventions.

Source: Adapted from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
Ideally, appropriate, evidence-informed policies and strategies are used in each tier.

- **Tier 1** schoolwide interventions aim to enhance positive behavior across the school and discourage problem behaviors. The Good Behavior Game is an example of a Tier 1 evidence-based strategy.
- **Tier 2** involves more targeted interventions for some students who are not fully responding to Tier 1 policies and are at risk for problem behaviors. Tier 2 support programs often involve small groups of students or simple individualized strategies, such as having the student check in and check out with a designated staff member at the beginning and end of each school day.
- **Tier 3** involves more intensive individualized interventions for a few students exhibiting severe and persistent behavioral challenges and not responding to Tier 1 or 2 interventions. For example, a behavior intervention plan may be developed for each student in Tier 3, outlining mental health services and other wraparound supports which may be helpful. Students in need of Tier 3 supports often include students with developmental disabilities or behavioral disorders.  

Many schools recognize that student behavior problems are often associated with untreated mental health conditions. The PBIS multi-tiered framework is ideal for incorporating a range of mental health interventions, including mental health promotion, early intervention and treatment. For more information on school mental health programs, see HPIO’s policy brief Connections between Education and Health No. 2: Health Services in Schools.

**Continual monitoring of student progress**

Data collection and analysis are key to evaluating whether a school’s PBIS plan is successfully improving student behavior and academic outcomes. Schools should continually collect and monitor data, making adjustments when policies or practices do not seem to be having the desired effects.

**PBIS in Ohio**

The Ohio Administrative Code (3301-35-15) states, “Each school district shall implement positive behavior interventions and supports on a system-wide basis.” The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) State Support Teams and Ohio PBIS Network offer resources, technical assistance and training services to assist schools with PBIS implementation. Although school districts are required to use PBIS, ODE does not track the number of districts implementing it.

**Notes**

5. Ibid.