

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support: The Cure-All?

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Without the proper interventions, students displaying challenging behaviors have the potential to become unproductive members of society. Increased discipline infractions lead to decreased academic achievement. Schools have been prompted to focus their attention on student engagement as well as decreasing behavioral challenges, since the academic, behavioral, and social challenges of adolescents have an impact on society as a result of dropout and incarceration (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, and McIntosh, 2014). A *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (PBIS) approach is the application of positive behavior support on a whole-school basis, and incorporates multiple theories, including social learning theory, systems change, behaviorism, as well as prevention science (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). An effective PBIS program can play a vital role in decreasing challenging behavior in students and promoting positive school climate (Bear, Yang, Mantz, & Harris, 2017; Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Flannery et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2016); however, many schools struggle to implement and sustain PBIS in an effective manner (Sanetti, Kratochwill, & Long, 2013; Yeung et al., 2016). Given the complexity of the implementation of behavior intervention programs, programs such as PBIS require a considerable commitment from school leaders and teachers (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Horner & Sugai, 2015; McIntosh et al., 2013).

School-wide PBIS is a clear response to challenging behaviors and discipline infractions. PBIS is becoming an increasingly popular behavior management strategy that has been implemented in

over 9,000 schools in the US (Ögülmüs & Vuran, 2016). What is not clear is the effectiveness of PBIS programs as a response to intervention.

Discipline Infractions Impede Academic Progress

When teachers stop classroom instruction to discipline students, it has an adverse impact on student achievement. Teaching and learning encompass two vital components, which are instruction and curriculum (Gareis & Grant, 2015). Gareis and Grant (2015) also note instruction includes intended as well as unintended experiences, which are provided by a teacher who intends for their students to acquire a series of planned learning outcomes. Constantly disciplining students during a lesson takes away from the time a teacher should be spending teaching and giving instruction; this is an example of an unintended experience inadvertently teaching and reinforcing student's negative behaviors. If a student is removed from the learning environment because of his or her discipline infractions, it takes away from the time a student should be spending learning and receiving instruction.

Students with behavior issues have a higher risk for negative outcomes in the future, including higher chances of needing mental health services, special education placement, school dropout, and poor academic achievement (Darney et al., 2013). Hattie (2008) discovered one of the most effective behavior management approaches is positive reinforcement (effect size of .34). Furthermore, positive classroom climate and cohesion such as common goals and positive relationships have an

effect size of .56 (Hattie, 2008). A student's behavior, good or bad, has a direct correlation with the instruction they receive and their ability to perform well academically. Instructional time is extremely valuable and should be spent advancing academic progress, rather than lost addressing or reacting to problem behaviors. When it comes to student misbehavior, it is better to be proactive, rather than reactive. If the behavior problems can be predicted, they can be prevented. Predicted behavior problems can be addressed teaching expectations and creating classroom rules. Hagenauer, Hascher, and Volet (2015) conducted hierarchical regression analyses and found the relationship quality of students and teachers is greatly influenced by teachers' emotional disposition when providing students with instruction. There is also a strong correlation between specific praise and positively stated classroom rules and increased positive behaviors and effective classroom management (Reinke et al., 2013). Effective classroom management may result in better student behavior and fewer discipline infraction, which, in turn, may result in more time for instruction and constructive learning (Madigan et al., 2016).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Many people view PBIS as a school-wide behavior management program. While PBIS does assist in influencing and managing behaviors, it encompasses much more than a simple behavior management program. PBIS is an empirically supported system that can foster meaningful behavior changes among students with challenging behavior (Flannery et al., 2014). PBIS is an approach based on a systemic multi-tiered framework designed to prevent and intervene (Evanovich, & Scott, 2016; Horner & Sugai, 2015). A multi-tiered system, such as PBIS, demands that

the specific strategies applied at each level be regulated by the particular needs present within each school (Evanovich, & Scott, 2016; Horner & Sugai, 2015). More specifically, as the tiers progress in intensity, they are more centered on students that have shown not to be responsive to the preceding, more general, strategies (Evanovich, & Scott, 2016; Horner & Sugai, 2015). In line with prevention science principles, PBIS implements a Response to Intervention (RTI) concept to ensure academic and behavioral instruction is delivered to all students instead of waiting for problems to occur (Hill & Flores, 2014).

The PBIS program is a multi-tiered approach to assistance, through which students can access an expansive scope of mental health and behavioral interventions offered by well-trained school staff (D'Incau, Holmblad, & Director, 2014). The goal of PBIS framework is to assist in creating a positive school culture or climate (D'Incau et al., 2014). PBIS is not limited in the sense that it is a curriculum or a program, and is best described to be a decision-making framework which guides the integration, selection, as well as an implementation of the top behavioral and academic practices for refining desired outcomes for every student (D'Incau et al., 2014). Generally, in the school-wide context, PBIS entails the implementation of proactive and preventative approaches to correction, as well as positive methods for discipline (D'Incau et al., 2014). Through this implementation, PBIS modifies the behavior and belief systems of students, teachers (and other school staff members), and community, leading to productive and positive citizens, as well as safer schools (D'Incau et al., 2014).

Positive Reinforcement versus Negative Reinforcement

Whether it is attention seeking or attention escaping, all behavior serves a purpose or function. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a behavior management strategy that proactively addresses causes of challenging student behavior by attempting to understand students' reasons for it (Anderson et al., 2013). This differs substantially from traditional behavior management strategies that are reactive and punish students without considering the underlying causes for rule infractions (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Reactive and punitive interventions are problematic for curbing problem behaviors.

Several researchers have investigated the effects of positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, and positive reinforcement was found to be more effective for improving the school climate and reducing disciplinary challenges. Benner et al. (2013) posited punitive punishment in a school setting negatively influences the relationships between students and teachers, as reactive punishment may result in coercion. The researcher found that perceived coercion from teachers was more significant in students with emotional and behavior disorders within a punitive behavioral system (Benner et al., 2013). This indicated a positive reinforcement approach may not only reduce coercion, but also improve teacher-student relationships (Benner et al., 2013). Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) investigated the relationships between different classroom management strategies and student perceptions of school climate, and found similar positive results for positive reinforcement. Exclusionary discipline was associated with more negative perceptions of school climate, order, and discipline (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Similarly, Bear et al. (2017)

conducted a survey of 30,071 students from Grades 3 to 12, and also found a correlation between negative perceptions of school climate and punitive punishment, as well as a correlation between praise and rewards and positive perceptions of school climate.

Punitive and reactive behavior management may achieve compliance and reduce inappropriate behavior in the short-term, but sustaining compliance and reduction of challenging behavior is unlikely in the long-term, since the problem behaviors may not only return but even increase (Hill & Flores, 2014). Positive reinforcement may be able to adapt students' behavioral patterns in the fullness of time. PBIS has shown to be an effective approach for schools to change their entire school climate, yet specific steps should be followed to ensure successful implementation.

Incentives

Sometimes, incentives are regarded as essential to implementation of a PBIS program. While offering students incentives can be an effective way to promote compliance, the rewards system is not the sole component of a successful PBIS program (Reinke et al., 2013). Utilizing the rewards system that accompanies the PBIS framework is an effective way to gain student compliance. However, teachers that showed higher levels of general praise reported greater efficacy regarding classroom management (Reinke et al., 2013). Maladaptive behavior includes actions which result in a greater financial burden for the school district, reduced time available for instruction, and the cultivation of an unsafe learning environment for students (Strunk & Rossi, 2016). Also, teachers who had lower levels of positive interaction compared to negative interaction, have higher reports of disruptions (Reinke et al., 2013).

Behavioral challenges are present in all schools. The approach used to curb behavior challenges has a substantial impact on the success (or lack thereof) of reducing negative behaviors.

PBIS Impact on School Climate

A PBIS program implemented with fidelity has the potential to change the entire school climate. School climate is the consistency and quality of the interpersonal interactions in the school community that affect children's social, cognitive, as well as psychological development (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam and Johnson, 2014). School climate can typically be gauged from a simple trip from the school's parking lot to the school's main office. The demeanor of the individual tasked with greeting school visitors' influences a school's climate. A school's climate is the personality of a school (Tschannen-Moran, Parish & DiPaola, 2006). When students perceive high levels of punitive consequences in their schools, they view their school climate less positively (Bear et al., 2017). Conversely, perceptions of praise and rewards and perception of teaching social and emotional competencies were both positively associated with school climate (Bear et al., 2017). The school climate is also viewed as the overall perception of the quality of school life, which often includes dimensions related to feelings of social and physical safety, relationship quality, and fairness of rules (Bear et al., 2017).

Schools and their climate have a significant impact on the upbringing of a child, as children spend a large amount of their day in school. Teachers and other school staff play a pertinent role in the development of a school's climate. Employees working at effective schools often go beyond their formal job responsibilities and perform non-mandatory tasks without expecting any further

or compensation recognition (DiPaola, & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). To change student behavior, adult behavior must first change. Since PBIS requires a significant shift in teachers' thinking and behavior relative to student misbehavior, a systems change approach is necessary to implement the program fully (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). School staff's choice of behavior management may influence student perceptions of school climate and therefore engagement (Pas et al., 2015). Schools should keep and promote the shared ideals and values of the community and society, including ideals of tolerance, respect, democracy, and the vision of equity (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2015). Of these ideals, demonstrating respect for one's self and others' is essential to the social and academic advancement of students. In contrast to reactive behavior management approaches that rely upon punitive consequences to curtail undesired behavior, positive behavior support is a preventive approach that promotes desired behaviors (Bear et al., 2017).

Through effective implementation of PBIS, some schools were able to witness a complete school climate change in less than ten years. Mountain Creek Academy was beginning their sixth year of PBIS implementation and reported discipline referrals were reduced by a total of 46% (Rogers, & Richardson, 2014). The greatest change was experienced by the students, as they learned the needed social skills and achieved academic success. The previously mentioned findings delineate the variety of benefits of an effective PBIS program. However, positive results are only possible through teamwork, diligence, and fidelity.

Relationship Building

The key to developing a successful PBIS program is creating a well-trained PBIS team. The

PBIS team is responsible for analyzing data and developing plans for future behavioral success, which is shared with all other staff members (Walker et al., 2016). The PBIS framework should be developed by a school's team of parents, teachers, school psychologists, counselors, administrators, as well as students to fit with the values and culture of their school (D'Incau et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2016). There is a need for genuine trust between all the parties involved in the implementation of PBIS, as well as between the teachers and the students. Trust in relationships is only possible when implementing this program with fidelity. Benner et al. (2013) found that the provision of preventative behavioral expectations and positive reinforcement may reduce the dynamic of coercion to improve teacher-student relationships, which is an essential part of PBIS. Tschannen-Moran et al. (2006) stated that the quality of the interpersonal relationships present in a school was of utmost importance to student achievement.

Trust and the quality of relationships present in a school have a profound impact on the school climate. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) investigated the relationships between different types of classroom management strategies and student perceptions of school climate. The researchers distributed surveys to 1,902 students of 93 elementary schools; the results indicated usage of positive behavioral support is associated with more positive perceptions of school climate among students (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Students held more positive perceptions of fairness, quality of the student-teacher relationship, and order and discipline. Conversely, use of exclusionary discipline is associated with more negative perceptions of school climate. A cherished level of transparency should be upheld to reinforce trust.

Aside from the relationships between teachers and students, the relationships between teachers and administrators are also significant for the school climate change and school-wide evolution. Leadership is essential for relationship building and for successful implementation and sustainability of a PBIS program. Administrators' direct involvement in the implementation of PBIS is important for supporting attitude changes among teachers (Richards, Aguilera, Murakami, & Weiland, 2014). Moreover, the quality of the teacher-administrator relationship is essential to encourage teachers to take part in the paradigm shift (Galster, 2013). Cultivating relationships and trust could be achieved by revising program practices and goals according to feedback from teachers, and empowering them to view the innovation positively (Harriger, 2014). Flannery et al. (2013) added that ongoing support and communication is of utmost importance to sustain PBIS. As such, it will be of great value to foster relationships built on fidelity throughout the school environment between all stakeholders.

Buy-in

Willing acceptance and agreement with rules, processes, and vision of a PBIS program are paramount in attaining program success and sustainability. The entire school must buy into the program, as cohesion will have a substantial impact on the success of the program implementation. Several public schools have experienced improved staff, student, and school outcomes following the implementation of a PBIS program (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Failure to cultivate buy-in among the school community may lead to low implementation fidelity (Yeung et al., 2016); which may, in turn, deprive students of benefits of school climate renovations and improved student behavior associated with PBIS practices. Low buy-in from

teachers is especially concerning because it may result in the poor execution of positive behavior interventions and support (Yeung et al., 2016). Fidelity of implementation at the individual classroom level has been found to be the strongest predictor of PBIS program success (Mathews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2014). To maximize the fidelity of implementation, it is imperative the PBIS committee achieve buy-in from the entire school community; especially teachers and students (Feuerborn et al., 2013; Filter, Sytsma, & McIntosh, 2016).

Teachers' resistance to change can conceivably have an unpropitious impact on program implementation. Implementation fidelity in PBIS sustainability is jeopardized by a lack of teacher commitment to the principles of positive behavior support (Yeung et al., 2016). Teachers that firmly believe misbehavior must be punished are less likely to adhere to positive support practices (Yeung et al., 2016). Additionally, teachers who feel incapable of implementing positive supports are less likely to execute PBIS methods with fidelity (Feuerborn et al., 2013; Yeung et al., 2016). Feuerborn et al. (2013) also added that low buy-in could be a result of poor understanding of positive behavior support methods, philosophical disagreements with the foundational assumptions of positive behavior support, or perceived lack of time to implement methods of PBIS. Thus, school administrators should be pro-active regarding the factors which may influence teacher buy-in, and attempt to provide as much information as possible regarding PBIS to their teachers.

Transformational leadership skills are critical to achieving buy-in for new programs; especially when there is initial hesitation and uneasiness. Hattie (2008) found an effect size of .36, regarding the effectiveness of transformational

and instructional leadership for school management, and added transformational leadership yielded better student outcomes. Five leadership practices that foster staff implementations of innovation are relational practices, support for risk-taking, role modeling, observation, and feedback (Galster, 2013). Consistent support for job responsibilities in the work environment as well as personal support, empathy, and approachability from administrators are vital to encouraging a paradigm shift and attaining buy-in from teachers initially resistant to the program implementation (Galster, 2013). Other researchers found teacher buy-in could be cultivated through staff ownership and by incorporating teachers and staff as decision-makers in the standards and expectations of behavioral intervention programs (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, 2015; Valenti & Kerr, 2014). Building relationships, as previously mentioned, and empowering teachers through transparency will help PBIS committees achieve buy-in and promote successful program implementation, in order for the sustainability and effectiveness of SW-PBIS.

Proponents of PBIS

A PBIS program can prove effective when implemented with fidelity. School reform is well underway, and statistics have indicated that suspension and expulsion rates have decreased by 20% since 2012 (Steinberg, & Laco, 2017). These decreased rates are as a result of schools adapting more positive approaches to discipline, when compared to previous exclusionary and punitive punishment approaches (Steinberg, & Laco, 2017). Several public schools have experienced improved staff, student, and school outcomes following the implementation of a PBIS framework (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). PBIS is an empirically-supported system that can develop meaningful behavior changes among students with challenging behavior

(Bohanon & Wu, 2014). Johnson (2014) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the stakeholder beliefs, values, and feelings regarding PBIS in a middle school in North Carolina, as a Schoolwide Evaluation Tool indicated a sustained and successful program after six years of implementation. When implemented with fidelity, a school-wide PBIS program will assist in decreasing challenging behavior in students, thus increasing academic time, and promoting a positive school climate (Bear et al., 2017; Benner et al., 2013; Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Flannery et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2016). Freeman et al. (2015) also found increased student attendance under PBIS, which may have a positive influence on dropout rates; dropout rates have been strongly linked to attendance. Researchers have found the use of PBIS has been associated with increased teacher efficacy and lower levels of emotional exhaustion among teachers (Reinke et al., 2013; Sørli, Ogden, & Olseth, 2016). Research suggest PBIS is an effective, evidence-based program to implement in schools.

Opponents of PBIS

Though a vast amount of the research indicates positive implications of PBIS, some researchers voiced concerns regarding the program. One concern was the confusion between positive behavioral support (PBS) and applied behavior analysis (ABA), as some researchers indicated that PBS and ABA are the same construct, while others believe PBS is a new science (Tincani, 2007). As a result of this confusion, PBS will have detrimental effects on the environment it is implemented because the implementers will not be trained in ABA (Tincani, 2007). Praise and rewards in a classroom have been oversold, and constant positive reinforcement may decrease the intrinsic motivation of students (Adelman, & Taylor, 2006; Lawson, &

Lawson, 2013). Providing tangible rewards to students for good behavior, as in PBIS, lacks evidence of its success (Sugai et al., 2010). Bear (2013) cautioned that teacher resistance to praise and rewards may be valid, as there is a lack of evidence on the success of positive reinforcement. Although not specifically PBIS, Hattie (2008) found teaching reform programs (Core Knowledge, Success for All, as well as Accelerated Schools), which included 105 studies, have an effect size of .22; schools are often bombarded with reforms to decrease the achievement gap, yet the low effects indicated little confidence in and success of these reforms. Furthermore, Freeman et al. (2016) found no significant relationship between PBIS and academic performance and suggested that the benefits of PBIS might be experienced by certain high-risk students only, which would not necessarily affect school performance holistically. Miller (2016) added that there may be no discernible differences in student achievement or discipline referrals for the first year after the implementation of a PBIS program. The opposing evidence in the literature highlights the need for empirical evidence on the effectiveness of PBIS.

Implementation

There is a need to explore further the specific success characteristics researchers found in schools that claim successful implementation of PBIS. An effective PBIS program demands active planning and is required to identify outcomes, use data to make decisions, choose practices unique to the school and staff needs, and then carry out those practices by the school's implementation design (Farkas et al., 2012). A high degree of coordination among administrators, faculty, and staff is needed to maintain consistency and cohesion in standards (Dingfelder & Mandell, 2011). Furthermore, it has been found that more than a year of commitment to

PBIS programming is necessary to observe significant changes (Flannery et al., 2013) and produce the data to monitor such changes (McIntosh et al., 2013).

Schools strive for academic excellence, but many factors hinder academic excellence. It is necessary to ensure all students are given access to accurate and efficient behavioral and instructional practices to improve behavior outcomes and student academic achievement (D’Incau et al., 2014). PBIS provides schools with an operational framework as well as an array of sustainable practices to achieve positive behavioral and academic outcomes (D’Incau et al., 2014). Ross et al. (2012) found teachers in schools implementing PBIS with fidelity experienced significantly lower levels of burnout and exhaustion and higher levels of efficacy. They also found a correlation between schools with higher levels of PBIS fidelity and teachers reporting greater feelings of personal accomplishment (Ross et al., 2012).

Several schools have implemented PBIS to reduce a variety of challenges in their school, increase academic achievement, and reduce bad behavior. Schools all over the United States are implementing PBIS as school management plans (Johnson, 2014). Program factors that increase the probability of PBIS success are teacher buy-in, commitment, communication, teacher leadership, collaboration, as well as teacher voice (Johnson, 2014).

One way to begin the process of PBIS implementation is with administrative support by forming a team and developing an action plan (Walker et al., 2016). Then, the school administrators provide the teachers with a chance to give their input and feedback. The administrators then proceed to create a timeline and provide all staff with the opportunity to be a part of the

implementation. Next, the staff works together to establish school-wide goals, and develop a positive reinforcement plan including lesson plans, PBIS language, celebrations etcetera. The PBIS goals should also be shared with the community, the students’ parents, and other stakeholders through various means; including social media. The school staff concluded that persistence was very important for students and staff, and that sustainability is attainable when a school personalizes the PBIS framework to suit their needs and culture.

The successful implementation of PBIS results in several benefits for the school and the community. The benefits of PBIS in schools include increased academic performance, more instructional time, organizational health, as well as better perceptions of safety risk factors in the school (Sanger, Maag & Miner, 2016). The researchers further stated that PBIS could be very complex and that it requires a substantial amount of time, commitment, training, and financial support to be effective (Sanger et al., 2016). A few of the essential components of PBIS are the establishment of a leadership team, supporting and training a group of individuals who will be able to provide support and training at a later stage, securing the needed funding, creating a continuous evaluation system, and developing progress screening and monitoring (Sanger et al., 2016).

Implications

Student behavior infractions undoubtedly contribute to underperformance in academic achievement. Several schools have experienced improved staff, student, and school outcomes following the implementation of a PBIS framework (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The PBIS framework is specifically designed to promote positive student behaviors through positive reinforcement. The

entire school community must buy-in and contribute to program implementation to maximize the probability of program efficacy. To achieve buy-in, it is essential to foster relationships and trust between all stakeholders to successfully implement SW-PBIS. Educators must first teach behavior expectations before expecting students to adhere to them. Furthermore, it is imperative educators understand their behavior must change, in addition to student behavior.

The success of a PBIS program is dependent on several factors. The implementation of PBIS should be a long-term commitment; as results may not be immediately visible. The benefits of PBIS in schools include increased academic performance, more instructional time, organizational health, as well as better perceptions of safety risk factors in the school (Sanger et al., 2016). Johnson (2014) concluded teacher buy-in is the main factor that influences program sustainability. Even though the previously mentioned research is valuable, further research is necessary to extend the evidence on the benefits and success factors of PBIS. The successful implementation of a PBIS program may result in students being more engaged, which will, in turn, promote student desire and ability to perform well academically. Behaviors are learned; this means behaviors must be taught. Schools are in dire need of evidence-based practices to curb disciplinary infractions and to move away from punitive punishment tactics. The effective facilitation of learning will yield a decrease in behavior infractions and an increase in academic achievement.

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