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Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

by  
Meredith George

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 2020

Approved by

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## **ABSTRACT**

MEREDITH GEORGE: Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports  
(Under the direction of Denise Soares)

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the history, characteristics, and efficacy of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a substitution for traditional exclusionary discipline practices in response to negative and disruptive behavior in schools. Disruptive behavior is a significant concern for classroom teachers; effective solutions for minimizing disruptions are necessary to curb teacher burnout and improve attrition rates. PBIS relates to an implementation framework as opposed to a singular behavior program, therefore schools have a multitude of intervention options when adopting a PBIS approach to behavior. Three PBIS strategies (restorative circles, token economy, self-monitoring of performance) are described and evaluated in this paper to illustrate PBIS principles in action. Results of the review of literature indicate a strong association between PBIS and improved outcomes for students both in academic achievement and behavior, which in turn have a positive impact on teacher perceptions of self-efficacy.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EHA	Education for All Handicapped Children Act
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
FBA	Functional Behavior Assessment
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports
QCT	Quality Circle Time



## **INTRODUCTION**

Research continues to influence the strategies educators implement in schools and classrooms to overcome challenges related to classroom behavior; however, district-wide shifts in perspective continue to be needed. It is clear that traditional views on disciplinary practices are not successful in meeting the needs of students, as classroom behavior continues to be a primary concern in schools and districts across the country (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Chang, 2009). Of all the challenges that today's teachers face, such as limited access to funding and resources, startlingly low salaries, and increased standardized testing demands, student behavior continues to be a significant issue (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012; Chang & Davis, 2009). In fact, nearly half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years, with student behavior cited most frequently as the primary reason for leaving (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). As a result, our education system is in need of a significant cultural shift, so that new strategies can be implemented to better resolve the ongoing challenges of improving desired outcomes for student behavior and academic success.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based framework for improving student behavior through multi-tiered support of the social, emotional, and academic needs of a varied group of students within a school or district (National Education Association, 2014; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). The strategies and structures that support PBIS principles are more effective than traditional exclusionary

discipline systems at eliciting desired outcomes for student success on a variety of levels, such as improved academic performance and behavior (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). By adopting a PBIS framework, schools and districts are able to implement cultural-level changes that better inform their approach to challenges and obstacles within the community related to student behavior. PBIS offers a research-based solution to one of the most significant problems facing our education system today, the startling statistic that nearly half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career, citing behavior as the most prominent reason for their departure (Chang, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

## **HISTORY OF LEGISLATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

The central goal of PBIS is to improve the quality of education on a national level by positively impacting school climate (PBIS.org; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). This objective is not a new concept; in fact, legislators and stakeholders in the education system have been striving for improvement and progress since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This statute demonstrated the federal government's commitment to pursuing "quality and equality" in schools across the country, despite the fact that education was previously considered solely a state and local issue (ESEA, 1965).

ESEA 1965 represents the beginning of a nation-wide initiative to provide equal access to high-quality education, particularly for those previously limited by socioeconomic factors or disability, individuals deemed at risk for academic failure. ESEA 1965 established several provisions that continue to impact the nation's schools nearly six decades later. Title I of the legislation established federal funding for schools and districts with a "high percentage of low-income families," offering support through additional resources to combat academic achievement gaps caused by unequal distribution of income (Paul, 2016).

Another provision of ESEA 1965 regarding equal access to education is Title VI, which extended federal grants to create special education programs in schools and provided additional resources for students with disabilities. Though the grants helped start special education programs in some communities that would otherwise have been

unable to afford it, the idea that children with disabilities would have access to such programs was not guaranteed (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). It was still largely up to the local districts to decide whether or not they would include special education programs; in fact, districts were legally allowed to refuse education to any individuals that they deemed “uneducable,” whether it be based on a mental or physical disability (Martin, et al., 1996).

As a result, many children with disabilities were denied access to public education, even after the passage of ESEA 1965. Even those who were able to attend school were often isolated in separate classrooms without access to sufficient support and resources, receiving a lower quality of education simply because they had different needs than other students (Winzer, 1993). In 1972, Congress revealed that around “1.75 million children with disabilities were receiving no education, 200,000 were institutionalized, and an additional 2.5 million were receiving a substandard education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Finally, the federal government further expanded upon the initial provisions of Title VI with the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975. EHA 1975 initiated additional requirements specific to providing access to children with physical and mental disabilities for public schools receiving federal funds.

The specifications of EHA 1975 included a requirement for schools to “evaluate children with special needs and create an educational plan with parent input that would emulate as closely as possible the educational experience of non-disabled students” as well as to set up procedural safeguards to detail the administrative procedures for dispute resolution between families of children with disabilities and the school system (EHA

1975). The procedural safeguards established by EHA 1975 protect the rights of both parties while outlining a predetermined path for solving the complicated problems that can arise related to securing special education services.

After all administrative solutions are exhausted, parents and children with disabilities are then authorized to seek judicial reconciliation in conjunction with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, granting due process for issues of potential discrimination against individuals with disability in any federally-funded program. The 1973 Rehabilitation Act was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in our country, and it paved the way for securing equal access in special education programs using the power of judicial review; the procedural safeguards established by EHA 1975 helped alleviate the potential financial burden of seeking primary dispute resolution through litigation, thus strengthening the efforts of Section 504. Further, EHA 1975 also introduced the concept of least restrictive environment, which is the idea that students with special needs should spend as much time as possible with their nondisabled peers, in the general education classroom setting, extracurricular activities, lunch, recess, etc.

Because of the varying needs of each child receiving special education services, the amount of time a particular student is able to spend in the general classroom or among their nondisabled peers varies case by case. This is where the requirement for schools to create an educational plan for each individual receiving special education services becomes important; the families and children with a disability are able to work with relevant school officials such as teachers and administrators to determine what the least restrictive environment will be for the individual, securing the resources and support necessary to assist in their ability to participate.

In 1997, EHA transitioned into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorizing the key components established in previous versions of the legislature and developing an even greater emphasis on provisions for students receiving special education services to have access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers.

IDEA 1997 built on the strides made in earlier special education legislation through the development of accountability initiatives to ensure that schools are providing necessary supports, services, and educational access for students with disabilities. In order to receive federal funding for special education programs, states must meet several requirements clearly outlined and defined in IDEA 1997, several of which were set forth by the precedents of previous versions of the legislation such as EHA 1975 and ESEA 1965.

In addition, IDEA 1997 marks the first instance that PBIS appears in the context of federal legislation. IDEA 1997 states that educators in both special and regular education settings should consider “positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports” as well as “positive academic and social learning opportunities” to address behavior in schools (IDEA 1997). The inclusion of PBIS principles in IDEA 1997 occurred in response to research conducted in the decade prior at the University of Oregon, which indicated the efficacy of a preventative approach to improving student outcomes and reducing negative behavior in schools (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Through “applied demonstrations, research studies, and evaluation projects,” Lee, Sugai, & Horner (1999) indicated the success of implementing support systems that were both evidence-based and prevention-focused in improving both academic and social outcomes

for special education students (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). The conclusions found in this research were then used to inform the text of IDEA 1997 as reflected in the use of language such as “positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports,” forming the origins of PBIS as we know it today (IDEA 1997).

Overall, ESEA 1965 and its successive legislature illustrates a positive step toward expanding access to high-quality education as well as improving the overall quality of our nation’s school system; it demonstrated the federal government’s commitment to supporting education and providing federal funding to reconcile the economic disparity among districts and states as well as the achievement gap between students with disabilities and those without. These laws also represent the first instance in which equal access to educational opportunities is established in our legislature, a concept that continues to be a driving factor in educational reform. However, the issue of how to accomplish such a monumental goal remains a persistent topic of debate in our country today. PBIS is one solution supported by research to improve student outcomes and combat achievement gaps by improving the methods by which schools approach behavior, using preventative supports and evidence-based strategies to effect change that benefits students’ emotional development and academic achievement.

## **HISTORY AND CURRENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF PBIS**

Since the conception of PBIS, continued research has helped guide the evolution of its meaning to encompass our current understanding of PBIS. Though it began as a special education initiative, PBIS is shown to be effective in managing the behavior of students with and without disabilities. Over the past two decades, our understanding of PBIS has expanded to include support for all students, rather than limiting the focus to special education students (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). In addition, PBIS has evolved over time into a formalized framework of defining characteristics which function as both a perspective for considering student behavior and desired outcomes as well as a multi-tiered system of support that guides decision-making and implementation in schools (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Today, the emphasis of PBIS is on shaping the perspectives with which school communities approach student behavior and desired outcomes to help improve decision-making and implementation of evidence-based interventions which best support students' academic and social needs (National Education Association, 2014).

PBIS is an evidence-based, three-tiered framework to support students by changing how schools address student behavior and define goals for student outcomes within their learning community (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). The goal of PBIS is to initiate positive change within the foundational systems of schools so that the social and academic needs of students are met, thus reducing the occurrence of negative behaviors that disrupt learning and harm the social connections within the school community

(PBIS.org). This goal is the guiding factor in the organization of the framework into three tiers of support, which is designed to meet the needs of all students through specific interventions and supports at each level (PBIS.org; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

The first level of support is Tier 1, which focuses on universal prevention (e.g., classroom rules) of behavior for all students. The Tier 1 systems create a foundation for setting classroom and school-wide expectations as well as for rewarding students when those expectations are met. Tier 1 systems typically offer sufficient support for about 80% of students; the remaining 20% of students who are not adequately supported by Tier 1 systems alone will still participate in the universal prevention practices in addition to more intensive supports from additional tiers (PBIS.org; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). On a cultural level, Tier 1 support includes an emphasis on “prosocial skills and expectations” and a commitment to acknowledging positive behaviors as they occur (PBIS.org). In addition, schools should establish a Tier 1 team to regularly monitor school-wide practices in terms of their efficacy toward goals for student behaviors and outcomes (Horner et al., 2010). The Tier 1 team uses data from a variety of sources such as office referrals, state test scores, etc. to assess the practices and systems in place (Horner et al., 2010). Some individuals who are typically on a Tier 1 team are administrators, parent representatives, and classroom teachers (Horner et al., 2010). All individuals on the team combine their expertise on student behavioral and academic patterns to evaluate the data and make decisions with the core principles of PBIS in mind.

Within individual classrooms, teachers in a PBIS school should implement Tier 1 expectations and routines that align with the school-wide expectations so that students can clearly understand what is considered positive behavior within their learning

community (Horner et al., 2010). The Center on PBIS suggests focusing on three to five positively stated expectations to define and teach desired behaviors, framing goals for behavior in terms of what to do rather than what not to do (PBIS.org; Horner et al., 2010). In addition, classroom teachers should support the selected school-wide strategy for rewarding students when behavioral expectations are met, offering positive reinforcement and incentives for those who support the behavioral goals of the learning community (Acosta, Chinman, & Ebener, 2019). These strategies can be individualized to each classroom, but overall consistency between school-wide and classroom expectations and rewards should be maintained for best results (Acosta et al., 2019).

The next level of support, Tier 2, is defined as “practices and systems [that] provide targeted support for students who are not successful with Tier 1 supports alone” (PBIS.org). The goal of Tier 2 is to provide early intervention for negative behavior choices among students who are considered at-risk for behavioral issues, essentially providing support before the individual’s behavior escalates into a more serious problem (Horner et al., 2010). The supports in place in Tier 2 are more targeted to the individual, and about 10-15% of students require this level of intervention.

Support on this level is usually implemented through group participation, typically of ten or more students (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The specific interventions involved in this tier are flexible and dependent on the needs of the individual student. Schools should define clear procedures for identifying students for Tier 2 support, ideally using multiple assessment tools to ensure that this process is effective (Horner et al., 2010). Some examples recommended by the Center on PBIS include office discipline referrals, screening instrument scores, teacher nominations, and parent recommendations.

Once students are selected to receive Tier 2 support, there are a variety of practices that can be included in the targeted behavioral plan to increase the student's ability to self-monitor and self-manage their behavior, consequently improving their success in meeting behavioral expectations (Amato-Zech, Hoff, & Doepke, 2006; Shapiro, 2014). First, the student will need additional instruction on the social-emotional skills necessary to meet established behavioral expectations (Horner et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2014). They must be able to successfully choose and implement the appropriate prosocial skills for a given context (Horner et al., 2010). In addition, arrangements should be made for the student to receive increased adult supervision throughout the school day (Horner et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2014). Increased supervision creates more opportunities for the student to receive positive adult attention as reinforcement for meeting desired expectations as well as pre-correction to remind the student of expectations as a preventative measure (Horner et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

Further, teachers should assess students receiving Tier 2 behavior support to better understand their motivation for disruptive behavior, which may indicate a need for more intensive support or highlight an alternative behavior that could directly negate the disruptive choice (Horner et al., 2010). For example, some students may act out to avoid academic tasks that they feel are too difficult; additional academic support can combat this issue by increasing the student's skill level and self-confidence.

To monitor progress within Tier 2 systems, schools create a Tier 2 team to review interventions and provide support for teachers and other personnel who are in charge of their implementation (Horner et al., 2010). They also monitor individual students who receive additional behavior support to ensure that the interventions are effective. Typical

Tier 2 team members include a specialist or coordinator, school administrators, behavior specialists, and classroom teachers. Central to the core principles of PBIS, data should be a driving force in any decisions made regarding Tier 2 supports and interventions.

The most intensive and individualized level of support within PBIS is Tier 3. This level of support typically applies to the 1-5% of students who are not fully supported within the first two tiers (Horner et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2014). Students receiving Tier 3 support are considered likely to engage in highly disruptive behavior that limits their access to social and academic success (Horner et al., 2010). Some students who receive Tier 3 interventions may have developmental disabilities, autism, or emotional and behavioral disorders, while others have no specific diagnosis that affects their ability to participate fully in the learning community (Horner et al., 2010; PBIS.org). This level of support is more intensive, formal, and individualized than the two foundational tiers of PBIS.

To determine the specific strategies needed to support a student identified for Tier 3 intervention, a multi-disciplinary team must be assembled to collect data and analyze student responses to intervention (Horner et al., 2010; PBIS.org). This team includes an administrator, behavior representative such as a school counselor or behavior analyst, and teachers and other personnel who are trained to provide Tier 3 interventions. This group can be referred to as a Tier 3 leadership team because their responsibility is to monitor school-wide Tier 3 systems. An additional team is formed for each individual student receiving Tier 3 support (PBIS.org).

It is recommended that the individualized team conduct a functional behavior assessment (FBA) to formally assess the student's behavior (Horner et al., 2010). The

FBA assists the team identify the prominent negative behaviors and analyze the context in which they occur to determine a potential cause (Horner et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2014). Understanding the intrinsic motivation behind the individual's behavior can better inform the solutions and interventions that will best support the student. Using the data collected in the FBA, the individualized team then crafts a plan of various strategies to prevent negative behavior, teach expectations, and positively reinforce appropriate behavior choices. These strategies combine with informal support such as family involvement and social connections to form a wraparound support system focused on improving outcomes for the student (Horner et al., 2010; PBIS.org).

Students receiving Tier 3 support are continuously monitored using data and evidence-based strategies to evaluate student progress and analyze the efficacy of specific interventions by the Tier 3 individualized team. The behavior plan is flexible and adjusted as needed, with the ultimate goal to transition the student to fewer supports as they gain self-regulation ability (Horner et al., 2010).

In conclusion, the three tiers of support in the PBIS system outline a specific progression of procedures for addressing student behavior and implementing preventative supports that set students up for success. The structure of PBIS ensures that the needs of all students are considered, regardless of the variances between their individual needs, though the strategies used to accomplish this will look different at each school. Regardless of those differences, the systems and practices in place within each tier are based on the core principles of PBIS: providing support for all students, using evidence-based interventions and strategies, continuously monitoring student progress, relying on

data to drive decisions, and using a positive, preventative approach to student behavior (National Education Association, 2014; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

There are several defining characteristics that assist in explicating the PBIS framework; its guiding principles include a reliance on research to inform decisions, implementing supports that encompass the best interest of all students, and adopting a perspective on behavior that prioritizes prevention over discipline as much as possible (Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2013; National Education Association, 2014). Further, the structure of PBIS as three tiers of varied levels of support ensures that the learning needs for all students are considered when implementing specific interventions and programs. Within each level of support outlined in the three-tiered framework, schools must determine specific strategies and practices to implement across the entire school community. Consistency is an important component to the PBIS framework; all teachers, administrators, and staff must share common goals and perspectives related to desired outcomes in order to ensure that student needs, both academic and social, are fully supported (Acosta et al., 2019).

Finally, the foundational systems of a school must support teachers and staff in implementing PBIS-minded practices to ensure long-term, consistent focus on PBIS principles (Acosta et al., 2019). This involves distinct culture change in which administrators, educators, and other stakeholders collaborate and support specific goals for their learning community. When practices, data, and systems work together within the framework, student needs are supported and the best opportunity for improved student outcomes is established.

## **OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH PBIS**

Evidence-based support for PBIS illustrates that there are several outcomes related to social competence and academic achievement which occur as a result of implementing the PBIS framework in school communities. Each learning community is different, so the individual results of the framework may vary. Outcomes can be sorted primarily into three primary categories: improved student outcomes, reduced exclusionary discipline practices, and improved teacher outcomes, such as enhanced perception of teacher efficacy and/or school safety.

The first category of outcomes associated with PBIS is improved outcomes for students. In a PBIS framework, desired outcomes for students can be defined as increased academic achievement, improved social-emotional competence, and reduced bullying behaviors (Freeman, Simonsen, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi, & Horner, 2019; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Research indicates that the universal implementation of PBIS has a significant effect on student behavior and social-emotional development, as observed through an increase in prosocial behaviors that align with the established expectations of their learning community and fewer incidences of bullying (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012). Many studies show a consistent, comprehensive relationship between PBIS and increased academic achievement (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011; Horner & Sugai, 2015; Freeman et al., 2019). PBIS is a pathway to positive academic outcomes because reduced disruptive and negative behavior increases the opportunity for academic engagement and instruction time, both

of which are supported through research to predict academic outcomes (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006).

However, the results of a few studies did not indicate a consistent correlation between PBIS and academic achievement (Pas, Johnson, Debnam, Hulleman, & Bradshaw, 2019). While the impact of PBIS on behavior is more direct and therefore easily observed, research suggests that the effect on academic achievement is more long-term, which could contribute to the presence of minor discrepancies between short-term and longitudinal studies related to academic achievement and PBIS (James, Noltemeyer, Ritchie, Palmer, 2019; Molloy et al., 2013).

One explanation is that the referenced studies concluding that PBIS has a positive impact on academic performance evaluated data over longer durations than those who observed mixed rates of academic improvement (James et al., 2019; Lassen et al., 2006; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). Another variable to consider when analyzing academic achievement is the method of measurement; several studies use statewide achievement test scores as data to measure academic success, though these tests have been criticized for their validity in measuring academic achievement (Haladyna, 2006). In addition, variances between academic programs adopted by schools selected for these studies are uncontrolled variables that could influence academic success across participants. Further research is needed to conclusively determine the impact of PBIS specifically on academic outcomes, controlling for the variables that could potentially explain the divide among results.

The next method of measuring the effect of PBIS in schools is by observing the need for exclusionary discipline practices. PBIS functions to prevent negative behavior;

therefore, a decreased need for exclusionary discipline practices suggests that fewer negative behaviors are occurring (James et al., 2019). This connection can be measured through a variety of methods, such as a comparison in the number of office referrals, suspensions, and other school procedures for disciplining negative behavior. Studies evaluating the effect of PBIS implementation on school-wide behavior indicate a significant decrease in office referrals, suspensions, and other exclusionary discipline practices, as well as a decrease in the observation of disruptive behaviors (James et al., 2019).

For example, Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf (2012) observed that students in PBIS schools were 33% less likely to receive an office referral than those in the non-PBIS schools compared in their study. Comparable studies noted similar results; for example, Benner, Nelson, Sanders, & Ralston (2012) recorded a significant decrease in the frequency of problem behaviors in PBIS classrooms compared to non-PBIS classrooms with similar student demographics. In addition, research confirms that negative behavior choices are associated with lower rates of academic achievement (Benner et al., 2012; James et al., 2019). Exclusionary discipline practices contribute to this cycle because office discipline meetings, suspensions, and expulsions detract from the student's available instruction time. Therefore, PBIS is an effective solution for decreasing negative behaviors in schools through prevention and proactive support, which has been associated with academic achievement benefits as well.

Finally, PBIS elicits improved outcomes for teachers in the learning community as well. Fewer disruptive behaviors in the classroom allow teachers to focus more time on instruction and other procedures, and increase overall academic engagement in the

classroom (Carter, 2017). In addition, the universal implementation of PBIS can have a direct impact on teachers' overall perception of self-efficacy. Medina (2017) concluded that after implementing PBIS in their classrooms, teachers participating in the study experienced an increased sense of self-efficacy in terms of "student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management." In addition, Medina (2017) noted that participants felt more confident in their ability to redirect and prevent negative behavior from their students through the use of "clear expectations, praise, positive student recognition, and rewards," all of which are central characteristics to the practice of PBIS.

As previously stated, nearly half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years, most frequently citing student behavior as the primary cause of their exit (Chang, 2009). The persistent presence of disruptive behaviors in the classroom can be emotionally taxing on teachers (Chang, 2009; Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). PBIS has significant outcomes on teachers' overall perceptions of self-efficacy, primarily because it is so effective at minimizing and preventing negative behavior so that teachers can dedicate more time to instruction (Carter, 2017). In addition, several studies noted significant correlations between discipline referrals and measures of job stress connected to burnout and attrition (Jennett et al., 2003; Buchanan, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Therefore, PBIS can be a valuable solution to improve teacher attrition rates because it is an extremely effective method for managing student behavior.

In conclusion, it is clear that the PBIS framework offers an in-depth solution to the significant and complex issue of student behavior. The three tiers of support within

PBIS are more effective at managing student behavior than traditional exclusionary discipline systems by focusing on supporting student needs to prevent negative behaviors rather than offering punishment and discipline after those behaviors have already occurred. There are certain characteristics that define the PBIS approach to behavior and desired outcomes, including a need for evidence-based interventions, decision-making processes that are driven by data, and a general perspective on desired outcomes that encompasses support of students' social and emotional needs in addition to academic needs and performance. Through the use of these practices, schools can elicit beneficial outcomes for the students, faculty, and other shareholders in their learning community.

## **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOR**

It is critical to establish a foundational understanding of the many factors involved in student behavioral choices in order to visualize the comprehensive scope of PBIS in practice. Behavior plays a central role in creating an environment that is conducive to learning (Berliner, 1985). The academic success of students is dependent upon the presence of strong classroom management strategies and procedures that effectively address student behavior (Algozzine et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2019). Because PBIS has a preventative focus, classroom management skills that emphasize evidence-based techniques for avoiding disruptive behavior are an important component to the overarching framework.

Classroom management refers to “the ongoing process by which teachers seek to enhance students’ affective growth by creating and maintaining an orderly environment,” therefore creating a space where students are safe and learning can occur (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). The goal of classroom management in the PBIS framework is to encourage positive behavior choices that benefit and contribute to a learning environment while reducing and preventing behavior choices that are considered negative, such as those that are disruptive and detract from instruction time, creating optimal conditions for learning to occur (National Education Association, 2004). Classroom management involves several key elements, such as intentional design techniques for the physical space, verbal and nonverbal cues, established norms and expectations for behavior,

instructional materials, procedures, specified consequences and rewards, and so on (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). Classroom procedures are in place to initiate behavioral expectations for students by defining and encouraging desired choices. As a critical component of classroom management, procedures initiate a familiar routine to support students' ability to self-manage and take ownership of their behavior. A consistent routine established within the first weeks of the school year can prevent behavioral issues by communicating clear expectations and supporting smooth transitions between tasks (Carter, 2017; Medina, 2017).

Transitions can be a critical moment during instruction time; as students break focus to shift their attention to the next task, they are susceptible to disruptive behaviors (Carter, 2017). Proficient classroom management tools such as establishing a consistent routine and swift transitions can help students uphold classroom expectations and minimize the amount of time teachers spend disciplining disruptive behavior (Carter, 2017; Medina, 2017). Addressing a disruption in the classroom takes time; the more time teachers spend correcting negative behaviors as they occur, the less time they have available for instruction and other learning opportunities. Even as few as ten minutes per day spent providing behavioral redirection adds up to about 30 hours of lost time per year, a significant cost considering the likelihood that many of those behaviors could have been prevented (Carter, 2017; Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

In addition, research indicates the success of PBIS-minded strategies for modifying the physical environment of the classroom (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). Simple yet intentional adjustments to the setup of a classroom such as organizing supplies and designating certain areas to specific tasks can have a significant effect on

student behavior. For example, Guardino & Fullerton (2010) observed a noticeable increase in academic engagement and a significant decline in disruptive behavior after modifying areas in the classroom that were deemed “problem areas” for student disruptions. The idea of approaching all components of classroom management with the intent of minimizing potential triggers for off-task behavior to prevent as many negative behaviors as possible is a great example of the effect of PBIS on classroom management efficacy.

PBIS involves adopting a preventative and positive approach to classroom management, in which strategies are informed by research and focused on encouraging and rewarding desired behaviors through positive reinforcement, as opposed to traditional exclusionary discipline practices that focus on punitive measures and result in decreased learning opportunities for students involved in problem behaviors. There are many components to a comprehensive classroom management plan, and it is important to understand the many factors involved in addressing student behavior when considering the depth to which PBIS affects classroom systems. Implementing PBIS in a classroom involves a holistic perspective shift, in which all levels of behavior-related strategies are re-evaluated and intentionally planned to fit the PBIS core values of preventing negative behavior and using positive reinforcement to reward desired choices. The resulting outcomes of implementing PBIS to effect change in the current systems and structures of a school can have significant, observable benefits.

## **PBIS IN PRACTICE: THREE STRATEGIES TO ADOPT**

Following its introduction to federal legislation in IDEA 1997, PBIS continued to develop into a more formalized framework over the following decades through extensive research to include provisions for a grant to create a national Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. This center serves as a resource for schools by partnering ongoing research on preventative support systems for student behavior with teams conducting the implementation of such evidence-based practices.

Today, the Center on PBIS continues to provide large-scale assistance for schools and districts implementing the framework. The Center on PBIS regularly conducts research on topics related to PBIS and student educational outcomes and is a source of resources and other materials for schools adopting a PBIS approach to behavior. The Center on PBIS is federally funded via the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Programs, and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (PBIS.org). PBIS is the only behavior management framework specified in federal statutes on education, and the idea of implementing on evidence-based strategies and relying heavily on data to drive decision-making in schools is referenced throughout the text of the legislation (IDEA, 1997). The following are three PBIS strategies that are readily available to educators through the Center on PBIS that demonstrate the practice and implementation of PBIS in schools (PBIS.org).

## **Restorative Circles**

This PBIS strategy is a component of restorative practices, which are interventions and supports that can be implemented in a variety of ways to communicate respect, develop social relationships, and promote positive behavior in the classroom setting (Acosta et al., 2019; Soares, 2019). The restorative circles intervention is based on the Quality Circle Time model (QCT) established in research by Mosely (1998). The purpose of QCT is to facilitate respectful dialogue and discussion in a format that invites children to participate and encourages growth of social-emotional, problem solving, and communication skills, all of which have been associated with improved outcomes for behavior and academic achievement. (Acosta et al., 2019; Mosely, 1998). The restorative circles strategy expands upon the original QCT model to target classroom behavior, and has been found to effect positive behavior change by improving students' self-esteem, sense of social acceptance, and ability to express their emotions (Franks, 2001; Liberman, 2003; Morris, 1998).

Teachers can implement restorative circles in a multitude of ways throughout the school day and differentiate the activity based on specific needs of students in whole group or small group format. The procedures of the restorative circle dialogue should be consistent, focusing on three to five positively-stated expectations that should specify how students respectfully contribute to the conversation. The structure of the circle itself indicates a sense of community, signaling that all members are equal while the teacher fulfills the role of group facilitator (Soares, 2019).

Restorative circles can be implemented daily as part of the whole group classroom routine and procedures. One example is to incorporate a morning meeting restorative

circle to prepare students for the day, share and understand their feelings, and discuss classroom or learning news. Fun greeting options are easily integrated within the circle format to encourage student participation and engagement. Further, morning meeting restorative circles can function as an instructional tool when the conversation is tied to academic content.

In addition, restorative circles can be a valuable conferencing tool for difficult topics, such as resolving negative behavior incidents. These conflict resolution circles bring together individuals involved or affected by negative behavior incidents to create a safe environment for discussion, in which individuals listen to one another, share their feelings, and discuss solutions to repair harm and restore the sense of community and belonging among group members. During conflict resolution circles, it is important to facilitate dialogue that is positive and respectful, focused on understanding the social-emotional consequences of an action as opposed to delivering punishment or blame. Students should be encouraged to take ownership of their actions and brainstorm alternative choices and solutions that do not cause harm to others.

In conclusion, the restorative circles strategy is an effective PBIS tool for improving classroom dialogue and tackling difficult conversations with additional support. It is easily modified to fit a variety of uses in the classroom through whole group or small group involvement. When implemented frequently as part of the classroom procedures for respectful dialogue, restorative circles are a method for improving communication skills and facilitating collaborative and beneficial conversations in the classroom community.

## **Token Economy**

The second example of a school-wide, PBIS program to encourage positive behavior choices is the use of a token economy. A token economy is a reward system used to modify behavior through the positive reinforcement of desired behaviors. It is an effective strategy for improving student behavior through prevention and encouragement as opposed to criticism and punishment, and is successful in all elementary grade levels (Filcheck, McNeil, Greco, & Bernard, 2004; Hapsari, Tri Anni, Sunawan, 2017; Tiano, Fortson, McNeil, & Humphreys, 2005). Teachers distribute tokens as students display behavior choices that meet established classroom expectations, which can later be exchanged for rewards such as access to a fun activity or special treat. The criteria for earning tokens is explicitly communicated through classroom or school-wide expectations, and the reinforcement menu offers a variety of rewards tied to specific token values. In addition, token economies can be initiated as a program that involves the entire school or as a component of an individual classroom teacher's behavior management plan.

When organizing a token economy, there are many considerations and choices involved that can differentiate the plan to meet specific goals or needs. When choosing a token, it is important to choose an item that is age-appropriate (e.g., not a choking hazard) and readily available to minimize its cost, such as stickers, mock dollar bills that have been printed and laminated, or poker chips. In addition, the plan should include a procedure for collecting data on student behavior under the token economy program, such as a chart to record token distribution and purchases; this can also help mitigate any

issues related to stealing tokens from other students or producing fake tokens that have not been earned (Soares, Cegelka, & Payne, 2016).

Another component to the token economy is a reinforcement menu offering a variety of incentives and rewards for student behaviors. Specific token values are assigned to each selection. Data collected on the popularity of each option can help inform prices, which could be flexible and change throughout the year or stay the same. There are a few main categories of reinforcers: social reinforcement, such as a high-five or positive note to parent, primary reinforcement, which refers to food or drink, and tangible reinforcement, including objects such as stickers, toys, or other prizes as well as activities such as extra recess or fifteen minutes of puzzle time. An ideal reinforcement menu gives a variety of desirable options at many price points so that students are motivated to earn tokens. To increase student engagement, reinforcement surveys can be a helpful tool to learn about student preferences and interests which can inform the inventory of available prizes. In addition, involving students in the process of organizing the token economy and setting up the token store creates more opportunities for choice-making. Access to opportunities where students can make their own choices has been associated with improved academic and social behaviors (Jolivette, Wehby, Canale, & Massey, 2001).

Token economies can be easily differentiated to meet a variety of individual student needs in a diverse classroom population. Teachers can adjust the schedule of reinforcement to individualize behavior expectations for each student and promote fairness in the amount of tokens earned (Skinner, 1957). For example, a student who needs a significant amount of support in meeting classroom expectations receives a token

every time a positive behavior is observed on a continuous schedule of reinforcement, while another student who consistently displays positive behavior receives tokens on an intermittent schedule of reinforcement as the teacher gradually withdraws support and raises individual expectations, making it more difficult to earn tokens. Frequently referencing data to assess the efficacy of the token economy intervention can inform teacher decisions related to schedules of reinforcement and individual expectations and goals for behavior; this process is ongoing and extremely flexible to offer the right balance of support for both teachers and students.

There are several observable benefits to implementing a token economy. First, it is a strategy that targets specific behaviors through immediate and delayed reinforcement. For example, teachers can distribute tokens immediately after a desired behavior occurs without pausing instruction by simply placing a token on a student's desk. This action clearly communicates that the given behavior meets classroom expectations and provides a model for peers to follow. In addition, the use of tokens as a reinforcer can decrease the latency or amount of time between the behavior and the response because the tokens are so easy to distribute, which in turn strengthens the effect of that reinforcer on increasing desired behaviors (Skinner, 1957). Token economies also provide an opportunity for delayed reinforcement because students are able to save up their tokens to purchase various incentives. The ability to set and achieve a goal such as earning enough tokens to buy a specific prize is a valuable skill that students can develop by participating in a token economy program. Finally, the use of a token economy can teach students about basic financial skills such as saving and spending and promotes the use of addition and subtraction in a real-life scenario.

Token economies can be organized as a school-wide initiative to develop consistency as students move through grade levels and create a sense of commitment to a common goal. When the entire school is involved in the token system, students have more opportunities to receive tokens for positive behavior observed by other teachers, administrators, and faculty, such as during activity periods or recess. In addition, school-wide token economies help establish consistent behavior expectations across multiple settings and locations, making it easier for students to understand what appropriate behavior looks like and make better choices. In schools that do not adopt an all-encompassing token economy program, individual classroom teachers can implement their own program as part of their classroom management strategy toolkit to experience the same benefits related to academic performance and student behavior.

### **Self-Monitoring of Performance**

The third and final example of a PBIS strategy to improve student outcomes is self-monitoring of performance. Self-monitoring is an effective method to improve student behavior and academic performance, develop critical self-regulation skills, and practice goal-attainment (Amato-Zech et al., 2006; Burnette, O'Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, & Finkle, 2013). This behavior intervention includes a high rate of student involvement; students take ownership of the behavior or academic goals and adult support is scaffolded throughout the process. Studies show this strategy is an extremely effective tool and can be adapted to fit a variety of uses related to student behavior and academic performance; one study observed an increase in on-task behavior from a mean of 55% to over 90% after one month of the intervention (Amato-Zech et al., 2006). There are a number of ways to apply self-monitoring strategies to the classroom setting; the basic components

of this intervention include setting a goal, breaking it down into attainable and measurable objectives, and allowing the student to measure their own progress throughout the intervention.

Self-monitoring is an intervention that can be applied to academics as well as behavior. The process begins by defining specific target behaviors or main goals for the intervention, referencing baseline data to support these choices. The teacher and student collaborate to organize and agree upon a plan for meeting these goals by measuring observable objectives and defining a method for recording progress. For example, if a student's overarching goal is to meet grade level benchmarks for mathematics, one objective used to measure progress could be number of math problems completed on a timed fact sheet. Then, the student and teacher might select a time period of one month, with specific weekly goals such as five math problems completed on a timed fact sheet for week one, ten problems completed for week two, and so on.

During the self-monitoring period, the student would record their progress individually; this serves as a continuous reminder of the main goal the student is working toward which is broken into more attainable steps, and illustrates progress as the student improves which might not otherwise be noticeable. Because progress toward each smaller goal is visually displayed in the data, students are able to conceptualize their long-term improvement, which can be extremely motivating. The teacher also records data on the student's progress to confirm student-collected results. During the intervention, frequent check-ins are needed to ensure that timely progress is being made; teachers may decide to adjust objectives throughout the process to maintain weekly goals that are sufficiently challenging and attainable. Charts are an effective tool to organize

self-monitoring of performance data in a student-friendly format that is easy to use and understand, and using stickers or fun colors to record results can increase engagement. Again, student choice is a powerful tool to create a plan that the student will be excited about and committed to.

Self-monitoring interventions help students take ownership over their behavior and academic performance. The process itself serves as a model for attaining significant goals: specifying a target outcome, breaking it into smaller steps, and monitoring progress to adjust as needed to stay on track. Teachers can adjust the amount of supports in the self-monitoring plan to develop the student's ability to independently monitor their progress over time, and the objectives can be big or small depending on the target outcomes. This strategy is an evidence-based intervention that is proven to be effective at improving behavior and academic performance; it is student-focused and includes many opportunities for the individual to experience a sense of ownership over their academic and behavior goals.

## **CONCLUSION**

Behavior is an intrinsic component of academic performance and desired outcomes in education; finding effective strategies to elicit positive results for student behavior and academic success continues to be a prominent topic in education research. PBIS is an evidence-based approach to improve behavior and academic outcomes through the use of multi-tiered supports that began as a special education initiative and transitioned into a holistic approach for improving the outcomes of all students. Its central focus is on implementing strategies that can effectively prevent negative behavior and support the social and emotional needs of students. Through positive reinforcement and an emphasis on establishing multi-tiered supports, PBIS provides a more effective alternative to traditional exclusionary discipline practices for eliciting improved behavior and academic outcomes, both of which are critical elements to improving the overall quality and success of our country's education system.

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