

**WAY
TO
GO
School
Success
for
Children
with
Mental
Health
Needs**



"I love to read," by Isis Hudgins, grade 3

* The drawings in these Fact Sheets were produced for Way to Go by students in two programs operated by Washington Very Special Arts: the School for Arts in Learning (SAIL), a public charter school serving children K-12, and the ARTiculate employment training program.

Positive Behavior Support: What It Is and Why It Works

A Proven System A **NEW APPROACH** to school discipline and the creation of a safe learning environment has the potential to address the longstanding needs of children with serious mental disorders who struggle in school. It's called positive behavior support (PBS). PBS is not a program, but a system, based on decades of behavioral and biomedical research.

To be most effective, PBS must be implemented school-wide. When it is, the results are extremely promising.

What Is PBS? PBS changes how schools respond to students, improving student behavior by reinforcing desired behaviors and eliminating inadvertent reinforcements for problem behavior.

Because successful PBS is established and run by a team with representatives of the entire school building, it is recommended only for schools where at least 80 percent of the staff is supportive of it. All school personnel—teachers, principals, administrators, bus drivers and cafeteria staff—as well as students know the expectations for student behavior. Students are taught the skills needed to meet these expectations, and are supported and recognized when they display appropriate behavior. Recognition is immediate, using positive reinforcement. Consistent feedback is provided by all adults.

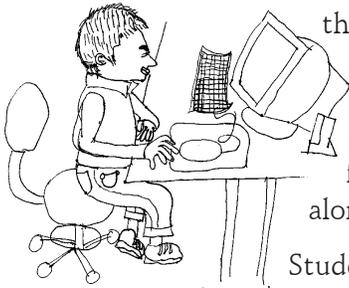
Helping All Students All students in school benefit from PBS at the school-wide level (termed the universal level or Tier One). However, while this is sufficient for about 80 percent of students, others will need more specialized attention. Some (termed Tier Two) require group or individual interventions in school and a few (roughly 3-7 percent of students who present the most challenging behavior, termed Tier Three) require individualized services, generally involving other agencies in addition to the school. Students with serious mental disorders most often fall into Tier Three.

Students Who Need Additional Services Once PBS is in place school-wide, students who continue to have behavioral problems can be identified easily and early intervention services can be provided for them. Students in Tier Two who are at risk for developing more serious behavior problems are often those who show poor academic performance, have limited support from family or community, suffer the ill effects of poverty and/or have a disability. They may progress to needing intensive interventions if they are not helped. Under PBS, an assessment is made and a strategy developed (generally for small groups, but sometimes individually) to change these behavior patterns and provide additional services, such as counseling.

PBS for Children with Serious Mental Disorders

Intensive services may be needed for Tier Three students, who have the most significant problems and for whom the universal and secondary strategies are insufficient. An individual team is assembled for each student in Tier Three.

The first step is to understand why the behavior occurs. Using a functional behavioral assessment (FBA), the team considers the who, what, when, where and why of the problems. Behavioral research suggests that individuals engage in a behavior because it is functional—it either averts an undesirable consequence or results in something that is desired. It is therefore critical to understand the events that trigger and maintain problem behavior. The team will assess both triggers and the student's strengths and needs, develop a plan of strategies to remove the triggers, teach new skills, ensure positive reinforcement and eliminate inadvertent support for problem behavior. Both student and family are an integral part of the team, along with professionals.



Students in Tiers Two and Three will need supports that schools alone cannot offer. Interagency collaboration with community mental health agencies is essential for the individualized services that children with significant mental health needs will require. (See Fact Sheet #3.)

► In Austin, Texas, each PBS school has an IMPACT Team, a multi-disciplinary group that develops strategies to address the needs of students at risk of dropout, expulsion, residential placement or school failure. When the team identifies such a student, it mobilizes the services. Each child and family participates in individualized care planning that may lead to mental health evaluation, treatment, care coordination, education and training support, community-based out-of-home care, and flexible funding for various supports.

PBS Is Packaged for Schools

School-wide PBS is fully structured and packaged for schools through a technical assistance initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education. Essential to success is training for school personnel and ongoing technical assistance. Training must be continual as new staff are hired or as additional schools adopt PBS.

PBS uses in-school coaches to help translate training into practice and to support staff who are implementing PBS. In-school coaches are often school psychologists, social workers or counselors, who must initially be trained in PBS. In addition, PBS employs external coaches, who typically work with a number of schools, collaborating with the in-school coach and providing feedback to the state and region/district as well as providing guidance to individual schools.

► Maryland has trained more than 130 behavior support coaches, who collaborate with PBS teams to strengthen existing programs and provide leadership and guidance to schools that are considering PBS. Most coaches are school psychologists, who work with three to five PBS schools. They attend PBS-school team meetings and provide ongoing support to help schools implement and sustain PBS. Additionally, coaches meet at the state level five times a year.

Critical Elements: Families and Social-Emotional Learning

When schools implement PBS, they must ensure that they adhere to the best-practice standards, particularly family involvement and social-emotional learning. These elements are especially helpful for students in Tiers Two and Three, yet their importance is sometimes overlooked. PBS provides a strong platform for related programming, such as specific social-emotional learning programs and other youth-development practices. It also requires family buy-in, participation and support. If implemented

narrowly, PBS may improve the behavior of the 80 percent of students who respond easily, but leave behind the 20 percent who need additional services and help to develop socially and emotionally.

► As one elementary school teacher in Montana described it, PBS got the school on track to help children who need more specialized attention. As a result of working with the mental health team (a mental health professional and a behaviorist assigned from the Bitterroot Valley Cooperative), the school was able to develop intensive social-skills clubs and one-on-one activities for students who need individualized attention. This has provided important learning opportunities in a supportive setting for children who are in Tiers Two and Three.

Family Role Families play a crucial role in implementation of PBS, serving on school-wide leadership teams and on state, county or regional leadership teams. They also serve on Tier Two and Tier Three teams for their own children and to support other families. PBS schools have found that families become more involved in their children's education and with the school because PBS takes a strengths-based, problem-solving approach and engages families in a positive manner.

In addition, a number of schools hire parents as family liaisons to work on school PBS teams, facilitate family involvement and connect families to other community resources.

To facilitate this level of involvement, school-wide PBS initiatives:

- ☆ provide information and training for parents so that they can teach, advocate for and support their child;
- ☆ provide leadership training so parents of children with behavior problems can participate in PBS and other community and school initiatives, as well as support and mentor other parents; and
- ☆ provide youth-leadership training so youth can develop the knowledge and skills to support other youth and participate meaningfully in PBS and school and community efforts.

► In New York, a parent organization provides co-trainers at all PBS trainings and has developed a training manual and curriculum for family coordinators, who work as family liaisons in schools. These family coordinators ensure that the goal of families as partners is reflected in all aspect of PBS practice. In collaboration with the state university at Albany and other child- and family-serving agencies and organizations, they also create unified statewide trainings for a variety of human service initiatives so as to assist all stakeholders in their work to support children and families in an individualized, family-driven environment.

PBS Is Data-Driven One of the great advantages of PBS is that it is data-driven and structured to show results and problems. At the school level, PBS teams collect data on behavior—where problem behavior occurs and its consequences. This can then guide individual support plans and improve the implementation school-wide. In addition to observational data, schools collect data on attendance, office-discipline referrals, suspensions, alternate placements and expulsions.

► New Hampshire examines school hours regained due to reductions in problem behavior. In examining reports for one cohort of 22 schools, the state found that the average school gained 711 hours (2003-04 vs. 2004-05) by decreasing major problem behaviors, 339 hours due to fewer major office-

discipline referrals, and 239 hours as a result of reducing in-school suspensions.

How to Assess a School-Wide PBS Initiative

There is also a way for schools to assess their progress in implementing the critical elements of PBS. Schools that do not fully implement all aspects of PBS have been found to have poorer outcomes than those that adopt PBS in full.

► Illinois uses discipline referrals and data to show how rigorous application of PBS produces the best outcomes and how less consistent application reduces effectiveness. In schools that had a score indicating full implementation at the universal level, 84-89 percent of students had either zero or one discipline referral. Schools not meeting the baseline score for full implementation had only 58-69 percent of students with either zero or one referral.

In addition to outcome data, PBS implementation measures also allow schools to gauge whether they are implementing all the essential components of PBS. These include the following:

- ☆ School-wide behavior expectations are defined and taught to all children and rewards are provided for following expectations.
- ☆ A consistently implemented continuum of consequences for problem behavior is put in place.
- ☆ Problem behavior patterns are monitored and the information is used for ongoing decision-making.
- ☆ An administrator actively supports and is involved in the effort.
- ☆ The school district provides support to the school in the form of functional policies, staff training opportunities and data collection options.

Alternative Strategies Do Not Work

Both teachers and the general public cite discipline issues as the number-one problem in schools. Teachers say they feel unprepared and need assistance to manage problem behaviors. The result of these concerns is often a zero-tolerance policy and removal of persistent troublemakers. Yet punitive discipline approaches are counterproductive. According to research, a coercive and punitive environment and inconsistent rule-setting and application of consequences are major factors contributing to antisocial behavior problems. Positive approaches to discipline do the opposite.

PBS Can Improve Academic Outcomes for All Students

Academic achievement is linked to school safety, and academic, social and behavioral success are connected. Interventions to improve school climate, such as PBS, can lead to improved academic performance.

Educators see school-wide PBS as making life easier for everyone by:

- ☆ changing the school environment;
- ☆ significantly reducing discipline problems;
- ☆ facilitating improved academic outcomes and test scores, helping schools meet the standards of No Child Left Behind for all students;
- ☆ helping children who cause frequent problems in school and for whom no one has found an effective approach;
- ☆ addressing the social-emotional needs of all children; and
- ☆ increasing families' involvement in their child's education and in the school.

