

# **A System of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

## Module 14

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*Ms. Nelson has recently joined an elementary school where she teaches second grade. In this school, they have established a Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) Team. All teachers follow school-wide expectations of learning, responsibility, and respect. The SWPBS team has defined a process to manage behavioral issues at the school-wide level and has developed a continuum of teacher responses to manage classroom and individual pupil behavior. The principal provides leadership and support for this process. Students understand what behavior results in specific positive recognition and which behavior results in consistent corrective procedures.*

*At the beginning of the year, Ms. Nelson discusses with her students what it means to have expectations. She directly teaches behavioral expectations by modeling them and providing students practice opportunities to demonstrate examples and non-examples of responsible and respectful behavior. Students in her class continue to review the three school-wide expectations (learning, respect, and responsibility) after the morning routine of classroom announcements and recitation of the pledge of allegiance.*

*She is able to manage most transitions and class periods successfully; however, a specific group of students tend to become disruptive after they return from recess. She has started to think about how to keep this group of students engaged in learning after recess. She collects data on these students and discusses her concerns with the SWPBS team. Some of her colleagues share their knowledge about “response cards” and encourage her to use them with students in her class. As she applies this behavioral strategy, she asks specific questions to students that result in yes or no types of very short answers. First, she explains to students how to use response cards and then explains the steps they need to follow. After asking a question, she asks them to write their answers. Then she says, “cards up”. This means students need to hold their cards with both their hands above their heads.*

*The answer needs to be facing the teacher. After she has glanced at all the answers, she asks one of her students to model the correct answer on the board. Then she says “cards down”, which means the students need to erase the answers and get ready for the next question.*

*After she has implemented this strategy for two weeks, the students who were initially disruptive have started to show more engagement. Ms. Nelson takes data from her class and shares it with the SWPBS team. Ms. Hewett also wants to apply this strategy to her second graders when they are off-task during her math class. The members of the team continue to meet regularly to discuss their successes specific to their classes and students.*

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## **Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports**

SWPBS offers school personnel an approach to understanding why a student engages in a particular behavior and strategies to prevent the occurrence of problem behavior while teaching students prosocial skills. It is a framework that promotes the use of positive strategies in order to meet the diverse behavioral and academic needs of all students. The reauthorization of IDEA 2004 encouraged states and local educational agencies to adopt a preventative approach to addressing the needs of all students. SWPBS encourages educators to engage in a common approach to managing behaviors within the school and work together to establish a positive social and emotional climate by supporting prosocial and educationally appropriate student behaviors (Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007). This approach is a shift from using reactive and punitive methods to applying a preventative approach to eliminate academic and behavioral failure (Ervin, Schaughency, Matthews, Goodman, & McGlinchey, 2007). SWPBS is based upon core principles that include: maintaining a safe and effective learning environment, establishing clear definitions of behavioral expectations, acknowledging desired behavior, applying consequences or response systems to reduce problem behaviors, providing good instruction to teach appropriate behaviors, and creating data systems to track and monitor processes and outcomes (Stewart, Martella, Marchand-Martella, & Benner, 2005).

## **Research Supporting SWPBS**

The most common reason for student removal from the classroom is problem behavior (Cohn, 2001). Over time, students who are consistently removed from classroom instruction demonstrate poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and a lack of interest in school activities (Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002); Sawka, McCurdy, & Mannella, 2002). If not corrected, problem behavior often results in the loss of valuable instructional time for all students and inefficient use of staff resources and teaching time (PBISAz, 2012).

It is estimated that for every 100 office referrals, administrators spend 33 hours and teachers spend 25 hours away from their educational responsibilities (PBISAz, 2012). Additionally, every 100 behavior referrals yield approximately 75 hours in suspensions and loss of academic time for students (PBISAz, 2012). Given these facts, schools are beginning to apply approaches to prevent problem behavior from occurring so that teachers can spend more time teaching and students more time engaged in learning.

Recent research has documented positive effects of SWPBS in reducing the number of student suspensions and office discipline referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchel, & Leaf, 2010; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun 2008). Additional advantages of SWPBS include positive changes in student behavior associated with increased instructional time and improved student academic performance (McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). Schools that have opted to implement SWPBS report improvements in behavior in hallways, cafeterias, playgrounds, and other non-classroom settings (Heck, Collins, & Peterson, 2001; Leedy, Bates, & Safran, 2004; Putnam, Handler, Ramirez-Platt, & Luiselli, 2003; Todd, Haugen, Anderson, & Spriggs, 2002). These results can be attributed to systematic and consistent use of SWPBS components, such as: active supervision, positive feedback, and social skills instruction.

Tiered levels of supports meet the diverse needs of students, including students who demonstrate longstanding behavior problems (Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008; Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Hawken & Horner, 2003). Tier 2 and 3 levels of supports, when implemented with fidelity (e.g., correctly and consistently), have resulted in decreases in problem behavior, along with an increase in attendance, work completion, and academic performance in students with chronic behavior problems (Hawken & Horner, 2003; Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007). Students who receive supports that are directly related to their problem behavior have shown significant gains and improvement in prosocial behavior and academic performance (Fairbanks et. Al., 2007; Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2005; March & Horner, 2002).

## **When to Implement SWPBS**

Schools often spend a considerable amount of time and effort responding to student problem behavior. This loss of time negatively impacts instruction and learning for all students. Schools that are looking for prevention strategies to change the learning environment often identify SWPBS as an ideal approach to meet school-wide goals of improvement. The success of SWPBS stems from a team-based approach where all team members are consistent in defining school-wide expectations, using the tiered approach to preventing problem behavior, teaching students prosocial behavior, and managing disruptive behavior effectively.

Successful implementation of SWPBS takes a considerable level of commitment by the “stakeholders” at the school. In order to produce consistent results, all the essential components of SWPBS need to be implemented with fidelity. To do so, faculty and staff invest a significant amount of time in professional development and receive intense training in the components of SWPBS and practices. In SWPBS, emphasis is on team-based coordination, investment in tiered levels of prevention, iterative progress monitoring, and a continuum of effective intervention options to meet student needs (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

## Guidelines of Implementation of SWPBS

SWPBS can be best applied if proper systems are in place for data-based decision making and progress monitoring (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The following steps are essential to establishing positive behavior supports in schools: (a) developing a systemic approach, (b) instituting data systems, (c) establishing implementation guidelines, and (d) facilitating implementation. Each of the steps is described as follows.

**Develop a systemic approach.** A system of positive supports relies on a strong leadership team that consists of various stakeholders from the district, school, and community. This team develops schoolwide goals and ensures that prevention/intervention practices are supported at all three levels. Professional development and technical assistance are provided to school personnel in using a continuum of procedures that they may need to encourage school-wide expected behavior and discourage inappropriate behavior. To promote sustainability, the leadership team encourages effective training, consistent implementation of systems' level procedures for ongoing progress monitoring, and data based decision-making (Bradshaw et al., 2010). In addition, at the building level, the school may opt to establish a separate implementation team. This team serves as a problem solving team and meets with a clear purpose and action plan to define expectations, match intervention to the function of the student's behavior (e.g., reason it occurs), and use data for decision making regarding the effectiveness of the intervention.

**Institute data systems.** Schools need to establish data systems to monitor behavioral outcomes and identify problems with implementation of SWPBS. Data provide vital information regarding behavioral occurrences school-wide, at the classroom level, and for individual students. In addition, these data systems provide a way to consistently monitor student progress and the outcomes of specific interventions. Teams of teachers and staff members receive training in using student behavioral data and program implementation. It is important for the team to interpret data appropriately in order to effectively define student expectations and set up strategies to encourage expected behavior and discourage problem behavior. When data systems are efficient and used appropriately for decision making, evidenced-based practices can be implemented with fidelity (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

**Establish implementation guidelines.** SWPBS is a system that utilizes universal supports for all students as well as targeted and more intense interventions for groups or individual students who need them. At tier 1, it is vital to obtain consensus among school personnel regarding a clear set of school-wide positive expectations and behaviors. Teachers and staff provide universal supports for all students and in all settings by encouraging the established expectations. This is achieved by establishing three to five positively stated behavioral expectations; explicitly teaching students these expectations, reinforcing and acknowledging students for following these expectations, and providing systematic correction and re-teaching opportunities when students fail to engage in appropriate behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2009). At tier 2, the interventions are implemented with a targeted group of students identified as at-risk based on a students' failure to respond positively at the universal level of prevention/intervention. Frequent assessment of response to interventions is vital in the second tier. Interventions at tier 2 may include: additional instruction, more intensive focus on social skill deficits, and frequent reinforcement for success. The third tier of support is the most intensive level of intervention. At this level, intensive individual interventions are delivered to

those few students who have not responded to either universal or targeted supports. The third level of interventions are function-based, meaning the intervention is aligned with student motivation to engage in inappropriate behavior (e.g., get attention, avoid demanding tasks). Intensive interventions often require collaboration with the family and may include community agencies as well. Approximately 3-5% of students do not adequately respond to the intervention at the universal (Tier 1) or targeted level (Tier 2) and need to receive personalized prescriptive interventions (Fairbanks et al., 2007; Ingram et.al, 2005).

**Facilitate implementation.** After school staff and administrators collaborate to identify expectations, they implement the system at all three levels. When all staff and students share a common vision and use common language regarding behavior in school, students are more likely to engage in desired behaviors. Teachers and staff members deliver behavior-specific praise when a student engages in desired behavior and respond to specific problem behaviors consistently based upon predetermined criteria. Students who may need additional instruction in social behaviors receive social skills instruction with multiple practice opportunities. The use of data in the school, classrooms, and for individual students help in decision making about the implementation of evidenced-based practices. Through an effective implementation of SWPBS, the school can increase its capacity to educate all students and can support student success by creating a positive teaching and learning environment.

### **Cautions Regarding the use of SWPBS**

The SWPBS model represents a shift from reactive and punitive methods of discipline to a preventative approach as a way to eliminate academic failure and student behavior problems (Ervin et. al., 2007). It is inadvisable to use this framework without administrative support. SWPBS requires a substantial investment of time on the part of stakeholders responsible for its implementation. Schools have been successful in fidelity of implementation when administrative support is present and local trainers and coaches are available (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Safran & Oswald, 2003). If school personnel do not obtain the needed training and support through coaching, the fidelity and sustainability are often negatively affected.

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