THE INS AND OUTS OF POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

by

Dora Steinert

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

July, 2011
ABSTRACT

by

Dora Steinert

Teachers and administrators have been utilizing the most effective ways to interact with students, support their learning, and help them become lifelong learners for years. Unfortunately, there is not a magical way to fix every challenge that arises in schools across the country. However, certain practices have been shown to be more effective when used correctly. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) seek to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased. The information in this paper seeks to define the components required to implement and maintain PBIS in a school through the research and findings from other researchers and literature. Additional literature reviewed in the paper discusses the effectiveness of PBIS in schools in the areas of behavior and academics.
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CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION  

Statement of the Problem

As long as schools have existed, teachers and administrators have been searching for the best methods to interact with students and support their learning. Teachers, administrators, and school districts recognize additional pressure through the implementation of more recent educational laws and acts. In 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were added and became law. These amendments brought forth new concepts, some of which provide direct connections to educating children with behaviors that do not follow behavioral norms and school rules. A few of the new amendments stated that students with Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs, must receive consideration to address poor behavior choices (Sugai et al. 131; Sugai, Simonsen, and Horner 5; Warren et al. 188). According to studies by George Sugai et al., students with severe behaviors make up only 1% to 5% of a school’s enrollment; however, they may account for more than 50% of the behavioral episodes seen throughout the school (Sugai et al. 132).

Therefore, educators have been challenged to establish methods that support students with Individualized Education Programs and those who exhibit outbursts of severe behavior. Schools across the country often lack the resources or time to identify and utilize methods to successfully meet the needs of all students. Although sufficient support may exist in schools, it may not carry over to other environments where a student displays problem behavior. Schools need policies and routines that align with research-supported practices to state and share expectations for all students. Positive behavioral
interventions and supports (PBIS) initiatives were directly influenced by the IDEA amendments and seek to improve the way educators respond to elementary students’ behavior (Bambara, Nonnemacher, and Kern 161; Feinstein 164; Horner and Sugai 231; Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland 182; Sadler and Sugai 35).

PBIS stems from years of research and discussions of behavior analysis (Sugai et al. 131; Utley et al. 197). PBIS “refers to the application of positive behavior interventions and systems to achieve socially important behavior change” (Sugai et al. 133). PBIS is an “application of a behaviorally based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the fit or link between research-validated practices and the environment in which teaching and learning occur” (133-4). Individuals who apply positive behavioral interventions and supports in schools are seeking environments that result in positive lifestyles for all students by focusing on positive behaviors and discouraging problem behaviors (Sugai, Simonsen, and Horner 5). Educators pursue this environment through the use of a school-wide purpose, clear expectations, and detailed procedures for how to follow the expectations and procedures (Cohen, Kincaid, and Childs 203). These expectations and procedures stem from the creation and studies of positive behavioral interventions and supports. The overall goal of PBIS is to reinforce positive behavior rather than using the negative focus of the traditional method. This paper addresses the requirements to implement and maintain positive behavioral interventions and supports and also reflects the effectiveness of the program through research studies focused on academics and behavior.
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the components required to effectively establish and maintain positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) in a school. Literature was reviewed regarding the establishment of PBIS in a school and the specific people and components required for the program to be successful. Particular attention is given to the effectiveness of positive behavioral interventions and supports on students’ academics and behaviors. The results of this research show that positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) seeks to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased.

Questions Guiding the Study

The topics and information in this research paper stem from multiple angles. Information related to theories behind PBIS, positive behavioral practices, requirements for PBIS programs, and the effectiveness of PBIS are explored. In order to discuss these topics, three questions must be answered:

1. How does a school implement positive behavioral interventions and supports?
2. How does support differ at each prevention tier?
3. How effective is PBIS?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include the shorter timeframe available for the study and the availability of access to peer-reviewed texts by experts in the field. There is an abundance of general research about positive behavioral interventions and supports, but
there is less research on specific studies regarding the effectiveness of the program on academics and behavior. An additional limitation of the study was smaller amounts of literature on schools and districts implementing PBIS programs. This review of literature is a combination of the details required to establish and maintain PBIS and specific findings from studies on its effectiveness on academics and behavior.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are needed to understand the components of positive behavioral interventions and supports. Acronyms are also included with some terms, as needed.

**Applied Behavioral Analysis**—The science of studying human behavior and using what is known about behaviors to stimulate, respond, and reinforce specific methods to shape and/or change certain behaviors. PBIS partially emerged from this practice (Carr et al. 5).

**Externalizing behavior**—An individual’s behavior that is directed outward toward another individual or individuals. Examples include aggression, disruption, and opposition (Tobin and Sugai 127).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**—Includes laws that require services to students with disabilities. It is backed by the U.S. Department of Education. It established the need for PBIS in 1997 (Sugai et al. 131; Sugai, Simonsen, and Horner 5; Warren et al. 188).
**Individualized Education Program (IEP)**—Mandated by IDEA. Each IEP is designed by educators for a specific individual and includes an explanation of his or her disabilities and a plan to help meet the needs of the child at school.

**Internalizing behavior**—Behaviors of an individual that are observed and noted as possibly harmful to the individual. Examples include fearfulness, depression, anxiousness, or negligence from peers (Tobin and Sugai 127).

**Normalization/inclusion movement**—A philosophy that includes the idea that people with disabilities should live in the same environment as others and have access to the same opportunities as others in school, at work, at home, and in other environments. PBIS partially emerged from this philosophy (Carr et al. 5).

**Office Discipline Referral (ODR)**—Forms that a teacher fills out when a student displays an inappropriate behavior and includes information such as the location, time, and details of the incident. This information is then entered in school-wide information system and analyzed by the PBIS leadership team and other faculty throughout the school year.

**Primary prevention tier**—The first level of support when implementing PBIS use in a school. The primary prevention tier includes expectations for all students, office discipline referrals (ODRs), reward systems for students, and expectations for faculty and staff.

**Secondary prevention tier**—The second level of support schools implement after successfully implementing the primary prevention tier for a set period of time. The secondary prevention tier focuses on specific groups of students who need
additional support. This support might include a check in/check out system or extra expectations and rewards in certain classes or areas of the school.

*School Wide Information System (SWIS)*—A program that is used to enter and analyze PBIS data. Information such as the location, time, and details of each incident are entered and specific tables and charts can be created to reflect behavior trends of students throughout the school.

*Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD)*—A program used in PBIS to help identify and screen elementary students possibly at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. There are three stages in the program, starting with a nomination from the classroom teacher. Stage two includes an inventory and a behavior checklist for each student. Stage three involves a fifteen-minute observation in the classroom and on the playground to determine a student’s performance in social and academic environments (Walker et al. 196).

*Tertiary prevention tier*—The third level of support schools implement after successfully implementing the primary and secondary tiers for a set period of time. The tertiary prevention tier focuses on individual students who are at the highest risk for academic and behavior failure. These students often come to school with pre-existing issues, and a specific plan is created by the PBIS leadership team to best support each student.

**Design of the Study**

The research study utilized previously published information pertaining to positive behavioral interventions and supports. No research was conducted. Instead,
existing research and literature relating to the topic were reviewed for the purpose of this study. No new research was created or existing data examined that would warrant the need for permission for either private or public parties.

To begin the research, information was first remotely accessed through the James C. Kirkpatrick Library (JCKL) online databases. Information was accessed through ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, and ProQuest Central. Books were gathered through contacts with teachers who utilize PBIS in their school. Throughout these searches the following terms were used: “school-wide positive behavior support,” “positive behavior support,” “PBS,” “PBIS,” “positive behavior support AND academics,” and “positive behavior support AND behavior.”

**Conclusion**

Schools are constantly searching for effective ways to support students both academically and behaviorally. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) system is one method that seeks to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased. This chapter introduces the research questions, vocabulary, and search methods used to guide this study. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature, including information about the required components for PBIS and information from studies in the areas of academics and behavior. In the final chapter the research questions will be discussed using the literature reviewed in chapter two.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

As long as there have been schools, teachers and administrators have been searching for effective ways to interact with students, support their learning, and help them become lifelong learners. Unfortunately, no magic wand exists to fix every challenge that arises in classrooms and school libraries across the country. However, certain practices have been shown more effective when used correctly. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) initiatives seek to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors and to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased. Practices are encouraged to be consistent throughout every area of the school to support the general student population. More detailed plans can be made for specific groups of students, and individualized student plans can be created once positive behavioral interventions and supports have been successfully implemented in the school for a set amount of time. The successful implementation of school-wide PBIS is required by the Office of Special Education Services within the US Department of Education, which oversees positive behavioral interventions and supports.

The research in this chapter explores the connections between positive behavioral interventions and supports and the school. It covers background information, the definition of positive behavioral interventions and supports, theoretical rationale behind PBIS, and a discussion of the three tiers of PBIS intervention. It also discusses the components required to make PBIS work smoothly and how it has been implemented in
schools across the United States. The discussion will include key elements of PBIS—the role of the administrator, leadership team, teachers, and staff in the implementation of the program. The research will include findings from studies that reflect positive gains in social and physical behaviors, discipline, academics, and connections between home and school.

**Introduction to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

The idea of positive behavioral interventions and supports is not a new concept. It stems from decades of research and discussions of behavior analysis (Sugai et al. 131; Utley et al. 197). However, the idea of PBIS seeking to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment is a more current approach. In the present section, background information, which includes establishing the need for support of students and the definition of positive behavioral interventions and supports, is described. In addition, details of how PBIS functions (prevention and intervention, behavior expectations, and reward systems), the theoretical rationale behind positive behavioral interventions and supports, and the specific components of all three intervention tiers of the program are included.

**Background Information of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

In 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were added and became law. These amendments brought forth new concepts, some of which provide direct connections to educating children with behaviors that do not follow school rules and behavioral norms. A few of the new amendments stated that students with Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs, must receive consideration for positive
behavioral interventions and supports to address poor behavior choices (Sugai et al. 131; Sugai, Simonsen, and Horner 5; Warren et al. 188). According to studies by George Sugai et al., students with severe behaviors make up only 1% to 5% of a school’s enrollment; however, they may account for more than 50% of the behavioral episodes seen throughout the school and handled by administrators and office staff (132). Therefore, educators have been challenged with locating and establishing methods to support students with Individualized Education Programs or outbursts of severe behaviors.

Schools across the country often lack the staff, time, or finances to recognize, implement, and maintain policies or methods to successfully meet the needs of all students. Moreover while proper and sufficient support may exist in schools, they may not carry over to other environments (e.g., home, neighborhood, and playground) where a student displays problem behavior. Schools need policies (e.g., procedural and discipline handbooks) and routines, such as opportunities to state and share expectations with students. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) initiatives are directly influenced by the IDEA amendments and seek to change and improve the way educators respond to students’ behavior particularly in the elementary grades (Bambara, Nonnemacher, and Kern 161; Feinstein 164; Horner and Sugai 231; Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland 182; Sadler and Sugai 35; Sugai and Horner 130; Sugai et al. 131).

**Definition of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

PBIS is a “general term that refers to the application of positive behavior interventions and systems to achieve socially important behavior change” (Sugai et al.
PBIS is not a new intervention or a new theory for appropriate behavior, but it is an “application of a behaviorally based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the fit or link between research-validated practices and the environment in which teaching and learning occur” (133-4). Educators who apply positive behavioral interventions and supports in schools are seeking to create and maintain environments that result in positive lifestyles for all students by encouraging and making positive behaviors more purposeful and problem behavior less desirable (Sugai, Simonsen, and Horner 5). Educators pursue these results through the use of a school-wide purpose, clear expectations supported with specifically stated rules, and detailed procedures on how to follow the expectations in every area of the school (Cohen, Kincaid, and Childs 203). These specific expectations, rules, and procedures stem from the creation and studies of positive behavioral interventions and supports. Many traditional approaches emphasize problem behaviors with reactive, negative strategies. The focus of PBIS is on positive behavior.

**Prevention and intervention as cornerstones of PBIS.**

The ideas of prevention and intervention found in PBIS stem from the previously mentioned Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which highly encourages the use of each of these strategies early on in dealing with a student’s behavior issues (Carr et al. 9). Positive behavioral interventions and supports emphasize prevention through the use of appropriate skill-building and an environment that allows and encourages the desired behavior (Carr et al. 9; Horner et al. 4; Sprague and Golly 54). Flannery, Guest, and Horner noted that many schools utilize negative consequences to
discourage problem behaviors from escalating or returning. However, their research reflects that true behavior changes are seen and made when students are taught desired behaviors and are positively supported when these behaviors occur (38). Interventions take place in both academic and behavioral areas, and they are most often used with students who need additional support in each of these areas (Flannery, Guest, and Horner 38; Sugai and Horner 131). Flannery, Guest, and Horner stated that current research on students at risk for academic and behavioral downward spirals are seen to respond well to individualized support (38-9). Individualized support and school-wide expectations make up the cornerstones of positive behavioral interventions and supports. In addition, schools that incorporate PBIS in their daily routines decide upon norms and appropriate behaviors based on the ideas of both students and staff. All of the established norms and behaviors are supported and expected from everyone in the school building.

**Behavior expectations and PBIS.**

Common behavior expectations for the entire school are created at the onset of a positive behavioral interventions and supports system. Students are taught main expectations as key terms at first. Words such as “safe,” “respectful,” “responsible,” and “learner” are emphasized. Students are then taught what it means and looks like to be safe, respectful, and responsible learners in their classrooms and other areas of the school. For example, educators at Clear Lake Elementary School noted the components of an effective behavior support system must be established before PBIS can target and focus on the support of classrooms or individual students (Colvin and Fernandez 252). At this elementary school, a leadership team took on the role of establishing the expectations for
teachers to learn and teach to students. They recognized that all staff members must support and ensure every student understands and follows the PBIS expectations that were taught, while continuing to teach and maintain additional expectations (Colvin and Fernandez 252). For example, students might learn the expectations in the hallways first. These expectations could include the phrases, “always walk” and “we walk silently in the hallways.” Students’ behaviors in the halls would be encouraged and enforced by all staff members, including custodians and cooks, while teachers continue teaching other expectations like those expected in the restrooms. As this district utilized positive behavioral interventions and supports, they noted the need to maintain PBIS through reinforcement of desired student behaviors.

**Reinforcement of student behavior.**

One component of the positive behavioral interventions and supports program is the usage of a rewards system to reinforce desired student behavior. These reward systems can be in the form of points, stickers, or signatures (Feinstein 168; Peck and Scarpati 7). Teachers establish the expectations and requirements to earn a reward, which might be referred to as a “tally,” and teach those requirements to students. Students, in turn, are able to save up a certain number of tallies and trade them in for some sort of reward. For instance, students in Sheryl Feinstein’s research were given rewards on an incremental basis: hourly, daily, and monthly. Students earned hourly points in each of their seven classes, and they could earn up to five points per class, for a total of thirty-five points a day. Points earned on a monthly basis resulted in a larger reward, which was greatly coveted by students. Feinstein noted once rewards were
earned, they could not be removed from students. Students who exhibited inappropriate behaviors could have negative consequences, but it would not involve removing rewards that the student had previously earned. In this way, positive reinforcement was maintained (Feinstein 167).

**Theoretical Rationale of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

According to Carr et al., the theoretical rationale for positive behavioral interventions and supports stems from three major sources: applied behavior analysis, the normalization/inclusion movement, and person-centered values (Carr et al. 5). The authors note PBIS would not have existed without applied behavior analysis, which is the extension or expansion of operant psychology connected with social issues (Carr et al. 5). This philosophy helped shape the way educators respond in teams to behaviors, the ways these behaviors are assessed, and how interventions are used (Sugai and Horner 131-2). In addition to these contributions, applied behavior analysis also helped shape the notion of establishing norms, continuing observations, and maintaining the procedures and methods of PBIS (Carr et al. 5; Sugai and Horner 131; Sugai et al. 135).

The normalization/inclusion movement, which is a key aspect in the creation of PBIS, is not new to positive behavioral interventions and supports or education in general. The United States has been pushing for inclusion, equal rights, and opportunities for all individuals since its founding over two-hundred years ago (Carr et al. 5). These equal rights apply to all individuals, including those with disabilities. PBIS seeks to include and normalize every setting for all individuals as much as possible. The mindset
of including everyone and maintaining the levels of respect and equal social connections
is a vital point of the normalization/inclusion movement (Carr et al. 5; Sugai et al. 136).

Similarly, PBIS includes the philosophy of centering values and importance
around individuals and what is beneficial for the interest of students and staff (Sugai et al.
136). A positive behavioral interventions and supports system is centered on people and
includes creating goals and interventions with students and staff in mind. Teachers take
their student population into account as they are creating and establishing norms for the
school. For example, teachers recognize the environment in which their students live and
eat. They might phrase expectations for the cafeteria in the same terms as are used in the
home. By building on what they learn in their home environment, students understand
the norms of the school better. This aspect also connects directly back with the ideas
behind the normalization/inclusion movement (Sugai et al. 136).

Guidelines and norms for behavior are focuses of positive behavioral
interventions and supports systems. PBIS includes allowing choice and decisions about
self-control, personal goal setting, and additional independent choices (Carr et al. 6).
Individuals with disabilities are not often given as much freedom as the general education
student because there is an established mindset of the inabilities or challenges of the
disabled student. Encouraging and allowing self-determination and personal goals for all
individuals in the school pushes students to become their own advocates and provides
further reason for expanding their abilities and confidence (Carr et al. 6; Sugai et al. 136).
For example, a student with a mental handicap may find it difficult to fulfill the
established PBIS norms for the general student population. With the idea of making
individual decisions, a student helps plan his or her own behavior goals that can be reached successfully and celebrated among peers and staff members.

Levels of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Since the theoretical rationales behind positive behavioral interventions and supports focus on what is best for the whole school as well as the individual, three different levels of support were created to provide guidance for everyone in the school. The primary tier or level is created for the entire student population and focuses upon establishing, teaching, and maintaining expectations throughout the school. The secondary tier focuses on smaller groups of students who might need extra attention or support. Finally, the tertiary tier was established as a more intensive form of support for individual students who need it (Bradshaw et al. 2; Ross and Horner 749; Walker et al. 194). According to Bradshaw et al. and Sugai et al., approximately 80-90% of the student population are successful with the support received at the primary intervention level (Bradshaw et al. 2-3; Sugai et al. 136). An average of 5-10% of a given student population receive additional support found in the key aspects of the secondary level. An even smaller 1-5% of students receive all three levels of support. These are students who have been unsuccessfully with the school-wide or small group goals found in the first two tiers (Bradshaw et al. 2-3; Sugai et al. 136).

Primary tier of PBIS.

The primary prevention tier is where all schools implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports begin. This layer focuses on lowering the number of problem behaviors or situations. This tier is created through the establishment and maintenance of
norms and effective behavior practices for all students. Goals are established for every area of the school so that students and staff are aware of the expectations (Tobin and Sugai 125). Often this is all of the support that is required for the majority of students in any given school (Sugai and Horner 131; Sugai et al. 136).

Many studies have been completed that focus solely upon the primary tier of positive behavioral interventions and supports. De Pry and Sugai completed a study at a rural elementary school of approximately 350 fourth through sixth graders. All students had been taught and encouraged to follow the main behavioral expectations throughout the school and in their classrooms. De Pry and Sugai’s study focused on keeping track of minor incidents that violated the set expectations of the school. The teacher used pre-correction phrases, such as “Thank you for keeping your voices at a zero volume in the halls.” The teacher makes these statements before a problem behavior is predicted to occur. These pre-correction phrases helped keep students focus on their learning. Teachers also used active supervision, which consisted of moving among students, interacting with them, reminding some of appropriate behavior, and positively reinforcing appropriate behaviors that were observed (256). The study noted the number of behavioral issues decreased drastically once the teacher began pre-correcting students’ behavior using the PBIS school-wide model (261).

Luiselli participated in two research studies that also utilized the primary tier of positive behavioral interventions and supports (Luiselli et al. 185; Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland 185). Both of these studies monitored the incorporation of PBIS in public schools. All students at each school were taught the same behavior expectations.
Teachers at each building helped create the expectations for the students, and everyone participated in teaching and reinforcing them as needed. Both of Luiselli’s studies showed that the number of office discipline referrals and suspensions decreased as the PBIS interventions were utilized (Luiselli et al. 189-95; Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland 185-7). In turn, students’ standardized test scores increased on average between the first year and the second year in the study of one urban school (Luiselli et al. 193). Luiselli, Putman, and Sunderland’s study, which focused on a rural middle school, also showed an overall decrease in the number of detentions based on vandalism or substance abuse as a positive behavioral interventions and supports system was implemented and maintained (186). Before implementing PBIS, the school dealt with a high number of cases of vandalism and substance abuse, which hindered positive behavior practices and academic performance.

**Secondary tier of PBIS.**

The secondary prevention tier is established after schools have successfully implemented and maintained the primary level for a few years. Interventions that are specific to a group of students are used in the secondary level (Sugai and Horner 131; Sugai et al. 136; Tobin and Sugai 125). Once the secondary tier is put in place, it can be used to reduce the number of existing problems or situations by providing additional instructional and behavioral support for a smaller number of students who are “at risk” for failure or just need additional support and focus. Schools establish varied requirements to note a student as “at risk” and in need of additional interventions. These students may have difficulties interacting with their peers or following instructions. The
intervention can be as direct as identifying more minor behaviors, such as frequent outbursts or interruptions during learning, that escalate or have the potential to escalate into larger issues (Tobin and Sugai 125).

Several studies have been completed on small groups of students who have received interventions on the secondary level and also on the school-wide primary level. Walker et al. focused on students in first through sixth-grade who needed behavior interventions on the secondary tier. Students who needed this extra attention and focus were identified through a system called the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD). Teachers filled out a detailed questionnaire/inventory of each child or group of children who they were recommending for further focus. These students were observed in the classroom and on the playground for a set period of time. These observations and the questionnaire/inventory provided details and information of how students performed behaviorally and socially in varied environments (196). As the teachers in this study participated and narrowed down the individuals who needed extra attention, they began making plans for the best methods to support this group of students (196). A small percentage, approximately 2-5% of the entire student population, was recommended for stage two interventions (196).

Tobin and Sugai also utilized the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders. Their study focused on younger elementary students who displayed tendencies of problem behaviors. Just as in the study by Walker et al., teachers in this study were taught and given a description of characteristics of students who might display behaviors warranting a closer and deeper focus (Tobin and Sugai 127). Six students from each
class who displayed a higher percentage of tendencies for behavior problems were listed. The students who were placed in the tracking group received not only the school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports, but also additional behavior education plans that focused upon certain skills and behavior goals (Tobin and Sugai 129). Students in this secondary level received attention and required “check-in/check-out” procedures to help them stay on task both behaviorally and academically. These secondary tier students also received support on self-control and social skills. They made the largest gains in cooperation, as compared to the population of students in the primary and tertiary levels at the school (Tobin and Sugai 133). Positive gains were also noted in lowering hyperactivity problem behaviors and increasing academic competence (Tobin and Sugai 138-9).

**Tertiary tier of PBIS.**

The tertiary prevention tier is used as an intervention after schools have successfully maintained and utilized both the primary and secondary tiers for an extended period of time. Similar to the secondary tier, the tertiary tier is created and used with students who are at the highest risk for undesirable behavior and academic performance. These students often come to school with pre-existing and well-established behavior issues (Tobin and Sugai 125). Level three is focused on reducing existing cases of complex and long-standing problem behaviors displayed by students who are at a high risk for social, behavioral, and emotional failure (Sugai and Horner 131). Individualized support plans are specially designed to help decrease the intensity, length, and/or frequency of problem issues. These students may have a detailed tertiary level plan that
aligns with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or other support plan that is intensely focused on by an intervention team (Sugai and Horner 131; Sugai et al. 136).

The study by Tobin and Sugai discussed above also focused on students and interventions for the tertiary level. Students in this portion of the study made positive gains in their average cooperation scores, which was a focus of many tertiary prevention level plans in this school’s PBIS program. Additional positive results included a decrease in the incidence of students bottling up or the internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors that cause students participating in the tertiary tier to get off-task (Tobin and Sugai 133-4). Internalizing behaviors are behaviors that are potentially harmful to a student’s emotional and behavioral tendencies. Examples of internalizing problem behaviors include fearfulness, depression, anxiousness, or negligence from peers (Tobin and Sugai 127). Externalizing behaviors are an individual’s negative behaviors directed outward toward another individual or group. Examples of externalizing problem behaviors include aggression, disruption, and opposition (Tobin and Sugai 127). In addition to the decrease of these problem behaviors, tertiary groups also decreased hyperactivity and increased academic performance and competence (138). Tobin and Sugai noted that “Positive Behavior Support is an effective primary prevention intervention, even for young children with serious internalizing or externalizing behavior problems” (140).

**Key Elements of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

Positive behavioral interventions and supports include many components. These components are required to help define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

to create a positive learning environment. In this section steps to positive behavioral interventions and supports are discussed, along with data based decision making, and ongoing support for PBIS.

Steps to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive behavioral interventions and supports include several key features, including proactive approaches to teaching, implementing, and improving social behaviors of students (Sugai and Horner 131). First, it is necessary to communicate both the vision of PBIS and the school administrator’s role in the communication process. Another step to PBIS includes the development of a leadership team and defining the role they will play in the creation and support of PBIS. A portion of the leadership team’s responsibilities includes providing information on their decision-making process for students and other teachers.

Communicating the vision of PBIS.

A portion of the proactive and prevention approaches to PBIS stems from communicating the vision and outlines of the program to school staff. This communication could be completed in the form of presentations, round table discussions, and wall displays of information that have been gathered (Flannery, Guest, and Horner 40). Bambara et al. stated the most common trend in their research was the need and importance of establishing a school culture in which everyone participating in the program had an understanding of the vision and implementation of PBIS (Bambara et al. 167). Without the communication and statement of this vision, staff members felt it was extremely difficult to carry out PBIS practices for even one student, let alone an entire
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school population of students (Bambara et al. 167). Bambara et al. also noted that communicating the vision of PBIS requires the support of staff and the school administrator (167).

There are research-based suggestions for the characteristics and methods school administrators can use to help implement and sustain PBIS in their schools (Flannery, Guest, and Horner 39). Some of these methods include having solid knowledge of PBIS and all of its factors, attending and participating in PBIS leadership team meetings, and monitoring the implementation of the program (Colvin 17; Handler et al. 34-6). Handler et al. and Sadler and Sugai documented that the administrator’s attendance during the teachers’ training and the beginning stages of implementation is crucial (Handler et al. 35; Sadler and Sugai 41). The principal’s attendance shows support from day one. It helps when the principal attends meetings when important key decisions for discipline policies and procedures are being made (Handler et al. 35; Sadler and Sugai 41). Similarly, these researchers verified the administrator should be active in modeling various practices teachers are expected to implement with students. If a rewards system is put in place, the administrator should be seen passing out rewards to students and using the common PBIS language (Handler et al. 35).

Bambara et al. also stressed the importance of the administrator’s support in their study. The administrator has a pivotal role in the acceptance and backing of PBIS and in ensuring staff members are able to follow through with the established expectations (169). The principal is a leader when promoting new practices and supporting the PBIS
methods. This includes acting as a school cultural leader by displaying a strong belief in PBIS.

Bambara et al. noted the participation of the building administrator in making decisions and acknowledging efforts made by the PBIS leadership team and staff was key (170). The rapport and appreciation of staff, parents, and other individuals was logged when the principal was available to listen to concerns and help make decisions. Finally, Bambara et al. stated it is crucial for the building principal to secure and provide resources needed for any PBIS activities and functions (170). This includes finances and opportunities for professional development and additional staff training. Teachers in this study also noted one of the most important factors was the ability to have sufficient time in the school day for planning and regularly participating in PBIS leadership team meetings, which is provided through support from the principal (Bambara et al. 170).

**Development of a leadership team.**

Just as the leadership and support of an administrator has shown to be crucial in the implementation of PBIS, the development of a leadership team has also been noted as a vital component of the program (Colvin and Fernandez 252; Handler et al. 30; Sadler and Sugai 37; Walker et al. 194). Colvin and Fernandez documented that the most important component of an effective PBIS model was the formation and production of a leadership team (252). The responsibilities of a leadership team include attending planning meetings, providing leadership at all stages in the implementation process, discussing and creating procedures and expectations for staff and students, and assisting with data collection and management (Colvin and Fernandez 252). Teams are often
composed of a variety of groups of professionals within a given school. Generally, six to ten members make up a leadership team (Sadler and Sugai 41; Walker et al. 98). These teams often include the administrator, general classroom teachers, special education teachers, and the school counselor or psychologist (Colvin and Fernandez 252).

The PBIS leadership team plays a crucial role in making decisions for the staff and school. These decisions require time and commitment from each of the leadership team members in order to plan and develop expectations, procedures, and policies (Handler et al. 30). A time commitment is also required as the leadership team shares and teaches the rest of the staff the PBIS expectations and norms for the school. However, before all of this can begin, the leadership team needs to be trained on key concepts. These key concepts include student development, discipline, and the PBIS theoretical approaches. The theoretical approaches encompass ways to change behavior, improve the school climate, and assist in the effectiveness of the program (Handler et al. 31). As leadership team members become more familiar and confident in their understanding of the rationale behind PBIS, they can begin to establish and make decisions for the school. These decisions are often made after team members have contacted other teachers, parents, and students for their input and thoughts behind the specific matters.

Data-Based Decision Making

Flannery, Guest, and Horner stated that one of the most effective tools when implementing PBIS is to frequently provide teachers and other individuals with data that reflect how they are following the model and if it is benefitting students (42). Collected
data should be organized in such a way that they are useful for administrators, the leadership team, teachers, students, and the community (42). Data are collected continuously and summarized regularly, to be shared with teachers (Horner and Sugai 231). Many districts and PBIS schools utilize various data collecting programs, such as School Wide Information System (SWIS) (Safran 4; Walker, Cheney, and Stage 96). These programs allow members on the leadership team to take the data collected throughout the school and organize them in a systematic way. The leadership team collects and enters data, rather than office personnel, so that they might be more aware of the trends and possible situations in the school. The team takes the data from office discipline referrals and organizes information in various charts, tables, and graphs to share with teachers, school districts, and anyone else seeking to understand specific components of the information. Various topics of data can be created and shared with teachers, including the time of day specific behavior problems occur, the most common behavior problems occurring in the school, and the total number of problem behaviors over the course of a few months or even the entire school year.

Refer back to collected data.

As data are being collected and PBIS is implemented in a school, there will likely come a time when the leadership team may need to refer back to the collected data. An elementary school in research completed by Colvin and Fernandez remarked the leadership team regularly reviewed data entered in a system in order to look for patterns in problem behaviors. Examples of patterns include trends in referrals, specific locations of those referrals, and patterns for individual students (252). The team then shared this
information with the rest of the staff at faculty meetings and made an action plan to help guide and improve behaviors and actions (Colvin and Fernandez 252).

Irvin et al. observed that the collection and review of data about office discipline referrals helped make decisions about students’ behavior and how best to handle given situations (“Using”). This office discipline referral (ODR) data, in turn, helped the leadership team determine and build the PBIS program (“Using” 10-23). Using a data collection program, Irvin et al. developed a written survey with five main categories to help collect data in their district (14). These categories included information about the school and ODR data entry at each location, the use of this data and reports, the usefulness of the information in making decisions, and the effects and ongoing needs as shown in the data (“Using” 14). Irvin et al. studied the access and use of data reports, including how frequently teachers accessed the reports. Of the twenty-two elementary and ten middle schools in their study, all had staff who accessed the collected data at least once each month. The main individuals accessing the data were the leadership team and the administrator; however, individual teachers and the counselor also accessed the reports each month (Irvin et al., “Using” 16-7). Individuals surveyed in Irvin et al.’s study noted their data collection provided efficiency and effectiveness in helping them make decisions in their schools (“Using” 19). Overall, the staff surveyed at each school found the regular collection and interpretation of PBIS data to be helpful in guiding and supporting their students (“Using” 21)

Irvin et al. also studied the validity of office discipline referrals in conjunction with the effectiveness of PBIS. Areas such as student and teacher perceptions, classroom
management, and behaviors were discussed. The ODR data were noted to help guide educators on how to proceed with behavior concerns, such as aggression, vandalism, and suspensions (“Validity” 139). One school observed that 50-80% of their referrals were coming from classrooms, so they decided to increase classroom management professional development for their teachers (“Validity” 142). Another school noted fighting at recess was a behavior problem in need of further attention. The leadership team developed an intervention specifically for the problem and partially monitored its progress through data collection. The team noted an 80% reduction in the number of recess discipline referrals once they developed a plan of action and monitored its progress (“Validity” 142). The ODR data in this study helped both teachers and students maintain their understanding of PBIS to follow school-wide expectations and discipline policies (“Validity” 139).

After studying the validity of ODR data and connecting them with PBIS, Irvin et al. observed that office discipline referrals can be useful as information to consult and use to support decisions for individuals and groups of students (“Validity” 142). Other schools have used ODR data to help make changes to school action plans and identify weaker areas that need further attention and support. Overall, the information by Irvin et al. found ample validity in the usefulness of office discipline referral data in schools and in conjunction with positive behavioral interventions and supports (“Validity” 144). Data-based decisions utilize data from multiple areas and help educators plan how to implement practices and provide ongoing support in the future.
Ongoing Support for PBIS

Data-based decisions utilize data from multiple areas and help educators plan how to implement practices and provide ongoing support in the future. In this section, information about monitoring and maintaining PBIS will be discussed. Administrators, leadership teams, teachers, students, and the community that stay focused and continually keep up with school trends, training, and changes in demographics ensure a more successful PBIS school. Staff and leadership team members need ongoing support from administrators and district officials. They also need ongoing professional development in order to stay connected and up-to-date on PBIS information. This ongoing support is required in order to continue to define, teach, and support appropriate behaviors in a positive learning environment where academic performances can increase as well.

Provide ongoing support.

In order to sustain the implementation of PBIS in a school, Flannery, Guest, and Horner discovered the administrator and leadership team must provide ongoing support for one another and the rest of the staff. They remarked that in order for the PBIS leadership team to be successful, they must have the support and empowerment of the principal. For example, arranging schedules to allow leadership team members to work together during common plan periods can strengthen the team and allow for ongoing success (40). Leadership team members can also be broken down further into subteams that focus on specific areas of need, thereby lessening the load of the group as a whole. This also brings in more individuals to the development and implementation of the program (Flannery, Guest, and Horner 40).
Part of this ongoing support provided by the administrator and leadership team comes from acknowledging accomplishments made by teachers and students. Students receive attention as educators praise and positively encourage them for their actions throughout each school day; however, the administrator and leadership team must make an effort to acknowledge the work and success of staff members as well (Flannery, Guest, and Horner 41-2). Flannery, Guest, and Horner observed successful administrators establish formal methods and plans to recognize the triumphs of staff members (41). The researchers suggest methods from simple thank-you cards to public announcements made to all staff members. Other schools ask staff to submit the name of a colleague who has surpassed the expected requirements (42). Whatever the method, Flannery, Guest, and Horner noted the importance of building up staff members who participate in the multi-year establishment and sustainment of PBIS (41).

**Ongoing PBIS professional development.**

An additional component of the ongoing implementation of PBIS is professional development and support for professional practice. Bambara et al. surveyed a group of staff members about this topic, and 92% of them stated adequate and ongoing development opportunities and continued support for professional practice were essential in order to successfully implement and maintain PBIS (Bambara et al. 171). These same surveyed individuals observed a lack of professional development and training can hinder or act as a barrier to the successful implementation of the program. Bambara et al. remarked that school personnel need to know the basic procedures and components of PBIS, as well as the knowledge and skills of behavioral analysis, data collection,
behavioral objectives, and other PBIS strategies (171). Collecting data and properly filling out discipline paperwork was seen as an especially weak area. Therefore, Bambara et al.’s research pointed out the crucial need for providing support that is ongoing and specific to the needs of the school and teachers (171).

In this same study, Bambara et al. recommended school districts and leadership teams provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to attend skill-building workshops. Workshops related to data collection and prevention strategies were especially recommended (172). In Bambara et al.’s study teachers provided several areas that they wanted to be put into place for support. These areas included structured meetings that occur regularly, ways to promote solid interpersonal relationships, ways to celebrate success of staff members, and opportunities for teachers to communicate and work with one another outside regularly scheduled team meetings. Another focus of the survey included questions about a strong leadership team coach with experience in PBIS, teamwork skills, and skills to motivate staff members (172).

**Effectiveness of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

Various studies showing the effectiveness of positive behavioral interventions and supports have been conducted. In this section the effectiveness of PBIS in accordance with school discipline problems (verbal and physical aggression, bullying, or substance abuse) and academic performance are described. Interactions with home and school (including attendance data) will also be discussed.
PBIS in Relation to School Discipline and Academic Performance

Positive behavioral interventions and supports and school discipline closely align with one another. Many studies discuss how the two parallel and work together to increase academic learning and decrease discipline issues. De Pry and Sugai studied sixth-grade students at a rural elementary school. Observers noted the active supervision and pre-corrections of teachers and students. Observers in the sixth-grade classroom collected data of minor behavioral issues, after the teacher had been trained to use active supervision and pre-corrections. The teacher identified appropriate behavior, taught students what was expected of them, and then used pre-corrections as needed (260). The results of the study showed a decrease in the number of minor behavioral incidents after the first baseline data was collected, and this number was even lower after a second baseline collection had been gathered (261). In addition, the sixth-grade teacher used more active supervision and pre-corrections following training and the second baseline phase (262). The researchers came to the conclusions that the number of problem behaviors can be decreased if a teacher is trained and utilizes active supervision and pre-correction strategies (263). These strategies may be further strengthened as the teacher proactively reminds and reteaches students the expectations and remains consistent in his or her usage of pre-corrections and PBIS language (266).

While studies of PBIS at the secondary level are rare, Sheryl Feinstein completed a study which included information about how male juveniles responded to a PBIS plan implemented in a boys’ correctional facility. Interventions for these individuals began with a discussion of the male’s behavior between a team of people, including the main
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teacher, student, additional teachers, and other individuals. This discussion was also paired with a study of documented data of the male’s behavior, academics, and relationships with others to determine the source of the problem behavior (Feinstein 165-6). PBIS was implemented in the correctional facility’s school. The male students who followed the set expectations received rewards on a regular basis, including every hour, day, and month. The results of the four-month long study showed an increase in positive behavior, which included participating in class, working without being prompted by a teacher, interacting well with others, and holding oneself accountable for behavior choices. The boys showed an average increased display in appropriate behavior in data documented hourly, daily, and monthly (169). In one month of the study, 100% of the students achieved their daily goal and 96% made the goal for the entire month (170). These results stem from an environment in which most boys were stated to have previously been rated on the lowest end of the scale before PBIS was implemented. Feinstein commented that behavior immediately improved as the PBIS plan was put into place (171). Students were given the option to make different choices and exceed expectations in the next class. This allowed each male student to have a fresh start in each hourly class, and this was the same with the start of each new school day (Feinstein 171). Feinstein concluded her discussion and study with the following statement: “Positive behavioral supports made a difference in this facility and the change was immediate. Students were able to substitute inappropriate behavior for appropriate behavior when given an alternative” (172).
Just as positive behavioral interventions and supports seek to decrease problem behaviors with positive support and guidance of students, it also focuses upon increasing academic performance for every individual in the school. Lassen, Steele, and Sailor completed a three-year study of a low income, inner-city school in the Midwest. The researchers hoped to study the relationship between problem behavior and academic achievement, among other areas. In the first year of the study, observers became more familiar with the school culture through observing and interacting with teachers and students and studying school policies and procedures (705). Posters listing appropriate behaviors were displayed throughout the school, and students were rewarded with tickets for appropriate actions, which they could turn in for various drawings.

As PBIS was implemented and studied over the three-year period, data were collected to determine the effectiveness of the program. Lassen, Steele, and Sailor compared results of actions and steps made by teachers in the baseline year and in year three of the study. Their findings showed a drastic increase in expectations defined, taught, monitored, and evaluated. Their results also reflected a significant increase in leadership and an ongoing reward system in the building (707). There was a large reduction in the average number of office discipline referrals from year one to year three, especially when considering the population of the school increased by over one hundred students during the time of the study (707). Academically, average standardized reading test scores improved slightly each year after the initial data were gathered in the baseline year (708). Standardized test scores in math increased significantly from baseline to year three. These standardized scores were compared with the number of ODRs a student
received, and it was documented that students with fewer ODRs scored higher on standardized math and reading tests (708).

Lassen, Steele, and Sailor commented that students receive more instruction time when they have fewer office discipline referrals and have a higher chance of receiving positive feedback and support from teachers (709). They estimated at least twenty minutes of classroom instruction time was lost for each ODR, as the student traveled to the office, discussed the problem behavior, and returned to the classroom. By implementing PBIS, Lassen, Steele, and Sailor estimated that 659 hours of classroom instruction time were restored as the number of ODRs decreased. This averages out to eighty-two eight-hour school days for over 600 students (709). These researchers suggested that the positive behavioral interventions and supports program is an effective intervention for reducing student problem behaviors and positively impacting academic performance, likely due to the increased amount of time students spent in the classroom (710).

Warren et al. also studied behavior problems that might hinder student learning. They completed a two-year study at a Midwestern middle school that had a high percentage of poverty, crime, and limited social resources (191). The researchers followed the school from the initial days of planning and implementing PBIS. They stated that teachers were trained, school-wide expectations were set and taught, a rewards system was put into place, and PBIS was maintained throughout the school (191-2). Over the course of the two-year study, discipline data were collected and analyzed. In comparing year one and year two data, there were significant decreases mentioned in the
number of office discipline referrals, in-school meetings between teachers and the student to discuss problem behaviors, time-outs (where the student leaves the classroom for a period of time), in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions (193). The total number of ODRs decreased by 20%, in-school meetings by 17%, time-outs by 23%, in-school suspension by 5%, and out-of-school suspension by 57% (193). Warren et al. found all of this documented data to be positive and in support of PBIS and student learning (196).

**PBIS and Connections between Home and School.**

Just as the implementation of the positive behavioral interventions and supports program has reflected positive gains in behavior and academics, there have also been changes observed in attendance and the interactions between the school, home, and the community at large. A study by Bambara et al. included a smaller group of parents who served as advocates and supporters of a larger group of parents as they figured out methods to support their children both educationally and behaviorally at home (Bambara et al. 165). The involvement of parents and students in the implementation of PBIS in this school district was one of the main components Bambara et al. focused upon. Participants in the study commented that parents help provide insight into student behavior and provide other important information required to create the proper support for the student (172). Parental involvement was also viewed as critical to the connections and consistency of practices between home and school. Bambara et al. remarked that the teachers supported families, which in turn allowed the parents to support their own children more effectively (172). Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland saw an increase in
student attendance over a four-year period, once PBIS had been established (187). The researchers remarked this increase in attendance stemmed from better support of students and parents, which was a focus of this school district and study as well.

Conclusion

Positive behavioral interventions and supports programs were established as a result of amendments passed in 1997 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These amendments created new requirements, including the requirement for educators to provide support for students with behaviors that do not follow school district and behavioral norms. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) initiatives were created to change and improve the way educators respond to primarily elementary students’ behaviors. In the initial stages of implementation, a PBIS leadership team is established and sets the expectations for students and teachers throughout the school. Classroom teachers teach the expectations throughout the school and all teachers and staff support them. The leadership team also collects data when problems arise and notes strengths and weaknesses in multiple areas of the school.

A PBIS program, which includes three levels or “tiers” of intervention, requires the support of the school administrator, leadership team, teachers, and additional staff. Students are taught the school-wide expectations in the primary tier. Small groups of students who need additional guidance are supported in the secondary tier. Students who are most challenged academically and/or behaviorally are supported individually in the tertiary tier.
Multiple studies have been completed on the behavioral and academic support PBIS provides for teachers and students. These studies reflect increases in standardized test scores and decreases in office discipline referrals and outbursts of problem behaviors. Warren et al. summarized the information found in the overall research with the following statement:

The school-wide application of positive behavior support is an effective alternative to the reactive, punishment-oriented approaches historically used by many schools. Educators who make use of proactive PBS strategies are in compliance with established IDEA guidelines. They are more likely to achieve safer, more disciplined schools and produce teachers who focus more of their time on teaching rather than managing student misbehavior (196).

Research illustrates the effectiveness of PBIS and its ability to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased.
CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) systems define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased. Students are taught expectations through the use of a common PBIS language by teachers and staff. They are supported on a school-wide level in the primary prevention tier. They are supported further in small groups in the secondary tier and individually in the tertiary tiers if needed. The information in this chapter seeks to answer three key questions.

1) How does a school implement positive behavioral interventions and supports? 2) How does support differ at each prevention tier? and 3) How effective is PBIS?

Implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive behavioral interventions and supports require certain documents, practices, and guidelines for students, teachers, and other staff members. One of the first aspects needed before implementing PBIS is teacher and staff support. The school faculty must be on board 100% to ensure the success of the program in every area. Once faculty and staff support the utilization of PBIS in their school, a PBIS leadership team must be established. This team can include six to ten faculty members, such as the administrator, school counselor or psychologist, special education teachers, general classroom teachers, and support staff (Colvin and Fernandez 252).

The PBIS leadership team creates three to four main terms to focus the efforts of the school, such as “safe,” “respectful,” “responsible,” and “learner.” Then they decide
the guidelines or norms for each of these key areas and what they would look like in every area of the school. For instance, the leadership team might decide in order to be safe and respectful in the hallways they expect students to walk silently. Therefore they would create an expectation that states, “We walk silently in the hallways.” These guidelines and expectations are shared with staff members and then taught to students. Students are rewarded with tallies or tickets to recognize that they follow the expected appropriate behaviors of the school.

The reinforcement of positive behavior encourages continued appropriate behavior throughout the school; however, PBIS requires forms and practices to be put into place to support those students who may need additional support. Office discipline referrals (ODRs) are filled out and documented when students display inappropriate behaviors. These ODRs can be recorded and tracked throughout the school in order to reflect growth or areas that need further attention from the PBIS leadership team, teachers, and staff. The PBIS team and the rest of the faculty make decisions on how to proceed with specific needs as shown with these data.

Additional factors are required in order to successfully implement positive behavioral interventions and supports in a school. Teachers and staff utilize proactive approaches to teaching, implementing, and improving social behaviors of students. Administrators of successful PBIS programs fully support PBIS and communicate to students and teachers what is required and expected for the success of the program. They also acknowledge accomplishments of students and faculty and provide the leadership teams and other teachers with time and resources to fully support and implement the
program. Finally, ongoing PBIS professional development and training for the leadership team, teachers, and additional staff is required to continue to successfully implement the program throughout the school.

**Three Tiers of Intervention**

Positive behavioral interventions and supports include three tiers of intervention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Each tier is utilized to support students in whatever areas are needed to help them succeed both behaviorally and academically. Each of the tiers is different. The primary tier is created for the student population as a whole. The PBIS leadership team creates expectations or norms for students and staff and displays them throughout the school (Tobin and Sugai 125). These expectations are taught and maintained in the primary tier and support approximately 80-90% of the student population in a school (Bradshaw et al. 2-3; Sugai et al. 136). If a student is unable to follow the expectations established for PBIS, an office discipline referral (ODR) will be documented and actions will be taken to support the student and help him or her succeed behaviorally and academically. Luiselli et al. noted that the number of office discipline referrals and suspensions decreased as the primary tier preventions were utilized throughout the school (189-95).

The secondary tier is established after the primary tier has been successfully in place for a set amount of time, often a year or two. Once this level is put into place, it is used to reduce the number of existing situations by providing additional support for a smaller number of “at risk” students who need additional attention and support. The number of students who need support on the secondary tier includes approximately 5-
10% of a student population (Bradshaw et al. 2-3; Sugai et al. 136). Interventions are created for the smaller student population and are specific to the group of students who need further support. For example, Tobin and Sugai focused upon elementary students who displayed problem behaviors frequently. Teachers were taught how to identify characteristics of students who reflected behaviors justifying further support and focus (127). These students received more attention and required “check in/check out” procedures to help them stay on task both behaviorally and academically. They were also taught strategies to maintain self-control and cooperate socially with peers (133).

The tertiary prevention tier is utilized once schools have successfully incorporated the primary and secondary tiers with students. The tertiary tier goes one step further than the secondary tier in that it supports an individual student, rather than a smaller group of students. The students supported with the tertiary tier are at the highest risk for poor behavior choices and academic performance and often come to school with pre-existing behavior issues (Tobin and Sugai 125). The support at the tertiary tier is focused on reducing existing, long-term problem behaviors. These behaviors are displayed by students who are at the highest risk for behavioral, social, and emotional catastrophes (Sugai and Horner 131). Individualized support plans are established in order to help lower the frequency, intensity, and length of problems with approximately 1-5% of the student population who need this level of support (Bradshaw et al. 2-3; Sugai et al. 136). Tobin and Sugai noted that supporting students with tertiary level preventions resulted in positive gains in cooperation, academic performance, and competence (138). Their study also showed a decrease in internalizing or externalizing problem behaviors and
hyperactivity with the same students, all of which were noted as hindrances for their overall academic performance (133-4).

**Effectiveness of PBIS**

Studies of the positive behavioral interventions and supports program have shown effectiveness of the program. Several studies show how PBIS and school discipline parallel one another and work together to increase academic learning and decrease discipline issues. Lassen, Steele, and Sailor completed a three-year study of a low-income, inner-city school in the Midwest. The researchers observed the fundamental components of PBIS, including establishing a leadership team, creating behavior expectations, and training staff in the first year of their study (706). Over the course of this study, Lassen, Steele, and Sailor noted an increase in behavioral expectations defined, taught, monitored, and evaluated. Their results also reflected a significant increase in leadership and an ongoing reward system in the building (707).

The study found there was a large reduction in the average number of office discipline referrals from year one to year three, especially when considering the population of the school increased by over one hundred students during the time of the study (707). Academically, average standardized reading test scores improved slightly each year (708). Standardized test scores in math increased significantly from baseline to year three. These standardized scores were compared with the number of office discipline referrals (ODRs) a student received, and it was documented that students with fewer ODRs scored higher on standardized math and reading tests (708).
Lassen, Steele, and Sailor commented that students receive more instruction time when they have fewer office discipline referrals and have a higher chance of receiving positive feedback and support from teachers (709). They estimated at least twenty minutes of classroom instruction time was lost for each ODR, as the student traveled to the office, discussed the problem behavior, and returned to the classroom. By implementing PBIS, Lassen, Steele, and Sailor estimated that 659 hours of instruction time were restored as the number of ODRs decreased. This averages out to eighty-two eight-hour school days for over 600 students (709). These researchers suggested that the positive behavioral interventions and supports program is an effective intervention for reducing student problem behaviors and positively impacting academic performance, likely due to the increased amount of time students spent in the classroom (710).

Warren et al. also researched behavior problems that might hinder student learning. They completed a two-year study at a Midwestern middle school that had a high percentage of poverty, crime, and limited social resources (191). The researchers followed the school from the initial days of planning and implementing PBIS. They stated that teachers were trained, school-wide expectations were set and taught, a rewards system was put into place, and PBIS was maintained throughout the school (191-2). Over the course of the two-year study, discipline data were collected and analyzed. In comparing year one and year two data, there were significant decreases mentioned in the number of office discipline referrals, in-school meetings between the student and teachers, time-outs (where the student leaves the classroom for a period of time), in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions (193). The total number of ODRs
decreased by 20%, in-school meetings by 17%, time-outs by 23%, in-school suspension by 5%, and out-of-school suspension by 57% (193). Warren et al. found all of this documented data to be positive and in support of PBIS and student learning (196).

**Conclusion**

Positive behavioral interventions and supports systems require the full support of the school administrator, PBIS leadership team, teachers, and staff to be effective. As the leadership team discusses and outlines the expectations of the program, students are taught the primary tier guidelines for the school. Over time, teachers and students recognize the success and support PBIS provides to all staff members and students. The leadership team is able to then help put small group secondary tier support into place, and eventually, individual tertiary tier support for the students who are at the highest risks for behavioral and academic failure.

Many studies have been completed on the behavioral and academic support PBIS provides for teachers and students. These studies reflect increases in standardized test scores and decreases in outbursts of problem behavior and office discipline referrals. The information in these studies illustrates the effectiveness of PBIS at all three tiers of support and its ability to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to create a positive learning environment where problem behaviors are decreased and academic performance is increased.
WORKS CITED


Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports


