

Chapter 9

PBIS in Schools: A Proactive Approach to Creating an Equitable School Culture

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ABSTRACT

Educational leaders have implemented positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) in schools across the nation to address behavior competence. Most educators have witnessed the evidence of its success in both managing behavior and improving academic outcomes. PBIS is a framework that incorporates evidence-based practices to support students by addressing their mental health and social/emotional needs. Using a culturally relevant and trauma-informed approach, PBIS can help support Students of Color, disciplinary sanctions, and the penal system. The proactive framework has been around for more than 20 years, teaching students behavioral expectations and reinforcing their positive actions. Despite this empirical approach, some teachers remain in favor of the punitive way of disciplining students. In contrast, others have adapted their mindsets to embrace rethinking discipline as a teaching opportunity like learning to read and write. These teachers agree with many scholars that social behavior is learned.

INTRODUCTION

Schools serve many purposes. Sugai et al. (2000) posits that children and families consider schools to be like home, where it is safe to learn and grow. To that point, this seemingly predictable educational environment serves as a training ground to support and nurture youth academically, socially, emotionally, and physically so they can be productive members of society.

Twenty-first century classrooms have become increasingly diverse and this has challenged educators to find ways to effectively engage students in the classroom (Sugai et al., 2000). Teachers report the demands of student engagement, managing behavior, and administrative tasks have increased burnout and attrition rates. Classroom management challenges, building healthy and sustainable relationships with students, and diversifying their pedagogy are among the top reasons that cause teachers to leave the

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profession (Allen & FitzGerald, 2017; Wong et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2017; Simonsen & Myers, 2015). Teachers, many may argue, ‘wear many hats’ in the classroom because of the extra roles they must play to perform the job well. A teacher’s job may appear simple at times, however, the classroom leader is responsible for many tasks including the implementation of evidence-based practices, differentiating their instruction, delivering high-quality instruction in an engaging manner, and assessing students’ learning relative to established standards (Simonsen & Myers, 2015). These additional responsibilities, not visible on their initial job application, add to teacher stress, lack of self-efficacy, and increasing attrition rates (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Many teachers report that the job of managing classroom behaviors is a struggle (Simonsen & Myers, 2015). A critical aspect of learning to manage behaviors in the classroom is teachers’ abilities to acquire enduring social and emotional competence with a sense of mindfulness, like having eyes in the back of their head (Postholm, 2013). Furthermore, the skill of knowing one’s self and intentionally getting to know the lived experiences of students is the beginning of creating a culture for learning where all students feel safe to participate, engage, and grow (Singleton & Linton, 2005). Misbehavior is rarely present in this type of learning environment. Many scholarly studies indicate a positive correlation between academic achievement and classroom management (Losen, 2013). That is, when children are engaged, less distracted, and value learning they grow academically, emotionally, and socially. Furthermore, recommendations to uphold our marginalized students’ civil rights in promoting social justice in schools include training teachers to manage their classrooms better.

A report by Alliance for Excellent Education (2014) confirms that the United States is spending more than two million dollars per year on teacher attrition with 50% of the new teachers leaving the profession within the first five years of employment. Increased attrition rates cause academic achievement gaps to widen and remain persistent and Students of Color, especially Blacks, suffer the most (de Silva et al., 2018). In 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan shared that “...students with disabilities and Black students, especially males, were suspended far more often than their White counterparts and often punished more severely for similar misdeeds” (Losen, 2013, p. 388). These alarming and inequitable facts, both academically and behaviorally, have yet to be categorized as a significant societal calamity and therefore continue to be under-supported and ignored (Stinson, 2013; Davis, 2005).

BACKGROUND

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) began to appear in schools with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997. In June of that year, the new law included two new approaches to help schools, “...positive behavior support (PBS) and... functional behavioral assessment (FBA)” (Sugai et al., 2000, p. 131). Furthermore, PBS (*which is the application of positive behavioral interventions and supports, PBIS*) and FBA were designed to provide schools with “...socially acceptable, effective, and efficient interventions to ensure safe, productive environments where norm-violating behavior is minimized, and prosocial behavior is promoted” (p. 133).

The U.S. Department of Education (Office of Special Education Programs) is responsible for funding the PBIS initiative. This grant established a “...technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (www.pbis.org)” (Sugai et al., 2008, p. 5). Some of the issues plaguing our schools that warranted this proactive framework consisted of establishing safe classrooms, replacing corporal punishment, and meeting the behavioral needs of all students, especially students with disabili-

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