BRANCHING MINDS

Tier 1 Behavior and School Climate Guide for School Leaders

Introduction

You can usually tell within moments of walking through the school door. Is this a positive, engaging place to be, or not? A healthy school climate has a direct impact on student attendance and behavior, staff retention, parent engagement . . . all things that lead to improved student outcomes. But with limited resources and increasing behavior problems, it's tempting to focus on putting out fires and surviving the day, with no time left over for proactive collaboration and prevention.

What I've learned through experience is that **even small steps in the right direction can have a big impact** on school climate and behavior over time. The most challenging school I've worked with - a disciplinary alternative campus - embraced this step-by-step approach. With consistent leadership from the principal and a dedicated PBIS team, the campus was transformed:
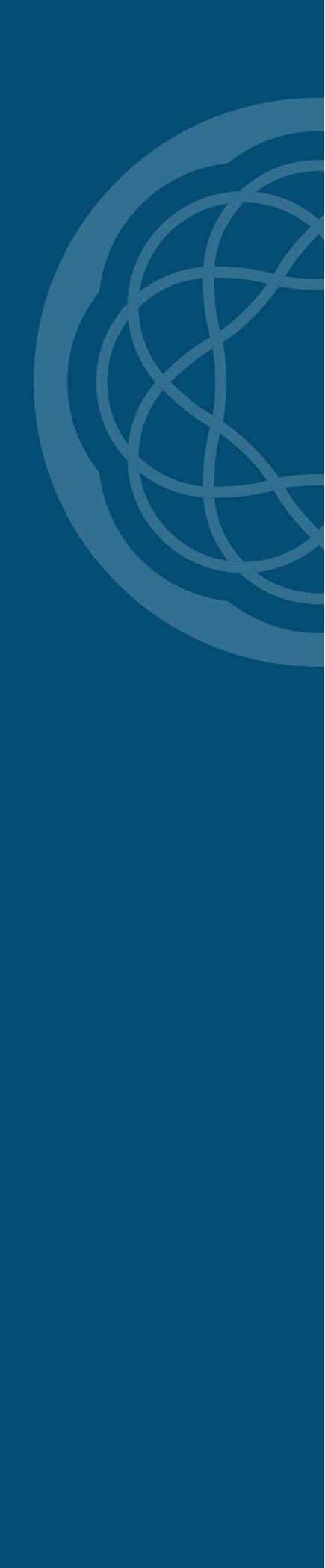
👍 Teacher turnover went from the highest in the district to the lowest.

👍 Discipline incidents were dramatically reduced.

👍 And best of all, students gained life skills that helped them become successful in school and earn their high school diplomas.

If they can do it, you can, too! The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework provides clear guidance for how to develop strong Tier 1 behavior support. And for students with behavior challenges, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are far more likely to be successful in a healthy school climate.

This guide is filled with **practical resources** you can start using immediately, along with **tips** I've learned from my own successes and failures in implementing positive behavior supports. A [campus behavior plan template](#) is also included to help your team document and communicate their work. I hope you will be inspired to take your own next step with PBIS!

Trudy Bender, Ed.S., LSSP, NCSP
Former District Behavior Coordinator
Sr. Manager of Thought Leadership Content, Branching Minds

Table of Contents

MTSS and PBIS

A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a framework for organizing resources and using data to meet the needs of all students, including those with challenges. In order to make the most of available resources, quality instruction and differentiated supports are provided for all students at the universal (Tier 1) level. When Tier 1 supports are strong, most students don't need any additional intervention. When data indicates that a student does need more help to be successful, strategic (Tier 2) or intensive (Tier 3) interventions are offered.
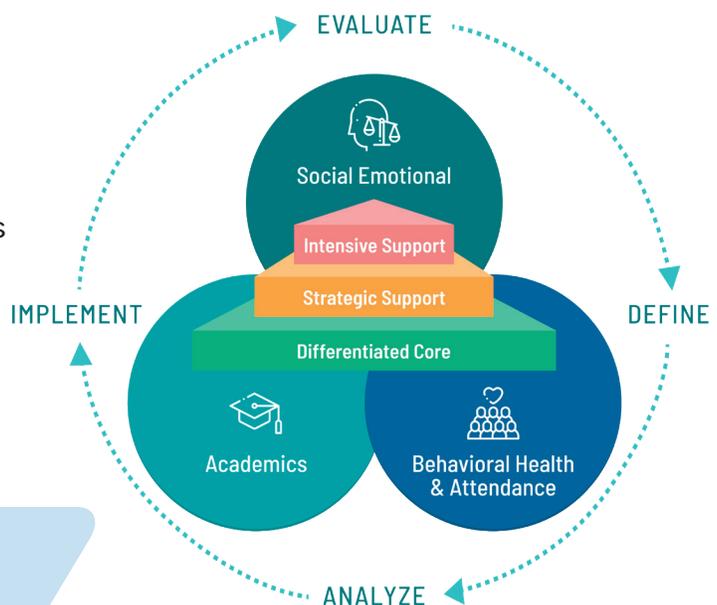
For example, in academics, Tier 1 support includes general classroom instruction, with high-quality curriculum and teachers who understand how to differentiate to meet the needs of of their students. In this way, more intensive and expensive academic interventions are reserved and available for students who truly need that level of support.

Tier 1 behavior support functions in the same way. All students benefit from clear expectations and positive relationships. When a school builds an intentional healthy climate for learning, most students have what they need to be successful. More intensive and expensive behavior interventions are reserved for students who need them, preventing an overwhelming number of referrals and concentrating resources where they will be most effective. This application of the MTSS framework to behavior instruction and intervention is called MTSS-Behavior or **Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).**

PBIS includes:

- School-wide positive climate and relationship building
- Clear structure and expectations
- A continuum of behavior interventions
- Data-driven decision-making

> **When Tier 1 support is strong, most students don't need any additional intervention.**

EVALUATE

Social Emotional

Intensive Support

Strategic Support

Differentiated Core

IMPLEMENT

DEFINE

Academics

Behavioral Health & Attendance

ANALYZE

Suggested Resource
Why Prioritize Behavior Support?

PBIS Implementation . . . Step-by-Step

Because PBIS is a comprehensive framework, there are many moving pieces that need to be addressed, created, and/or coordinated. **You and your team will not be able to do everything at once!** To determine priorities and create an action plan, you need to see the big picture along with what effective implementation looks like for each component.

The OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS has created a rubric for this purpose called the Schoolwide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI). This resource is freely available, along with a free assessment site to collect results over time. Many state PBIS organizations also have rubrics and resources to support educators n implementing PBIS.

A PBIS rubric is an efficient way for school leadership to assess:

- What behavior supports are currently in place

- What to prioritize for action

- What additional resources and data are needed

Suggested Resource

The SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory
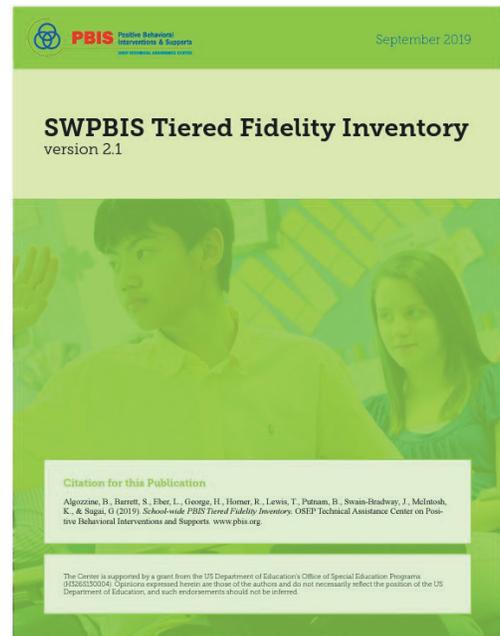
TIP

A clear path makes all the difference.

Whether you use the TFI or another rubric, the first time through often feels a bit overwhelming or even discouraging. It certainly was for me and many of the schools I've served. But after administering the TFI more times than I can count, I can tell you that a sense of relief will follow. The initial weight of assessing and documenting your current work will result in a clear picture of what needs to be done next. You only have to take the next step, and then the next. Within a year, most school teams show tremendous improvement when they follow this approach!

PBIS Leadership Team

You just can't do PBIS alone. You need a dedicated, engaged team to drive implementation, provide training and coaching, evaluate outcomes, and communicate progress. If the school principal is not the chair, they still must be seen as a visible leader and champion of the effort. In addition, your team will benefit from having members with behavioral expertise and from cross-pollination with the overall campus leadership team.

Consider the current team structure of your building and how the PBIS team will fit. Is a separate team needed, or could a current team supplement with additional people and responsibilities to meet this need.

Questions to ask about your PBIS Leadership Team:

- **Who will serve on it?**

- **Will you invite parent and student input?** If so, how?

- **What will you call your team if not "PBIS Team"?**

- **How often will you meet?** Set up an annual calendar so expectations are clear.

- **What data do you need to make effective decisions?** If your team can see who, what, where, and when behavior issues are occurring, they can do some focused digging to find out WHY and then take action.

TIP

The way your staff reports discipline incidents will determine the quantity and quality of behavior data available to your team

Be proactive in the way you set up your staff for reporting behavior incidents! I found that clear guidelines for reporting minor and major incidents in an online system made it easy for staff to provide the information we needed - not just to help individual students, but to do campus-wide problem-solving as well.

Branching Minds Behavior Incident Report
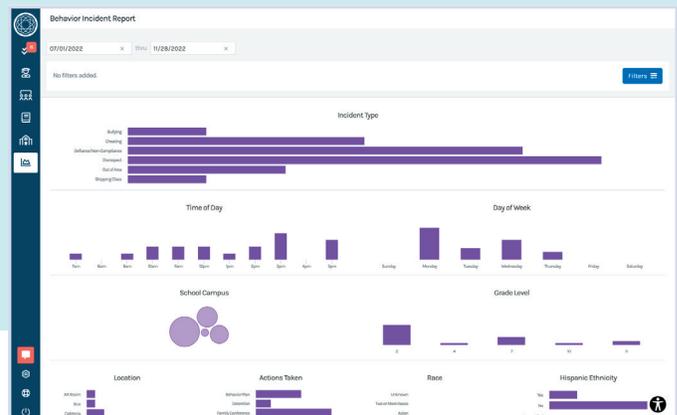
Behavioral Framework

It is essential to clarify and agree upon a set of beliefs about behavior management and discipline in a school. How will you and your staff approach behavior, talk to parents, support students, and support one another with behavior? Here are some examples to get you started:

- All students and staff deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Behavior is everyone's job.
- Behavior is learned and, therefore can be changed.
- Behavior skills can be taught just as academic skills are taught.
- We focus on what is under our control rather than blaming others.
- Mistakes are opportunities to teach and learn something new.

Behavior Guidelines

Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible

Have you heard statements like these before? Simple guidelines reflect the attitudes, character traits, and behaviors that are envisioned for our students. They are used in all aspects of school life to reinforce the importance of good behavior and **provide a common language for expectations**. It may seem simple, but it works! A common language creates a common culture – *"This is who we are at xyz school!"* And for students who struggle with behavior, **short, clear, and consistent language makes a real difference**. If you want to take it further, a campus-wide process to create guidelines can be a fun way to kick off your PBIS initiative. Here are a few more examples:

✻ *Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Try Your Best, and Never Give Up*
   West Avenue Elementary School

✻ *ROAR: Responsible, Optimistic, Attentive, Respectful*
   Wiley Disciplinary Alternative Program

✻ *T.R.U.E. GRIT: Teamwork, Respect, Understanding, and Encouragement*
   Tennyson Middle School

WEBINAR

Nurturing a Sense of Belonging in Schools

Features of Effective Behavior Support

We can't control other people's behavior, as much as we would like to! In fact, student behavior only changes when adult behavior changes. The following are factors under adult control —these are the things that can be adjusted to encourage positive behavior. Behavior interventions are simply a change or intensification in each of these features, and ideally, all four!

Systems and Structures

- Common areas, classrooms, activities, and transitions are organized to scaffold and encourage good behavior.

Instructional Approach

- **PROACTIVE:** Student and staff behavior expectations in each setting or activity are clear and have been explicitly taught, modeled, and reinforced with students and staff. Expectations are reviewed with students and staff regularly.

- **REACTIVE:** Staff responds to misbehavior as an opportunity to learn. Disciplinary consequences are structured to help the student move forward in a positive way and to develop any missing behavioral skills.

Relationship Building

- Staff and students are engaged in intentional relationship-building activities.

- There is a positive ratio of interactions among staff and students.

- It is easier to get attention by behaving correctly than by misbehaving.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

- Behavior is directly and intentionally observed.

- Multiple types of discipline data are collected and analyzed regularly.

Positive Climate and Relationships

Strong relationships and adult attention are the most powerful tools for behavior change available to school staff. **The day-to-day interactions between staff and students set the tone for your school.** When adults pay more attention to positive student behavior than to misbehavior, students' motivation to behave responsibly will increase. Staff should strive to maintain a ratio of 3:1 or higher in all settings as well as with individual students, especially when misbehavior is likely.

> Strong relationships and adult attention are the most powerful tools for behavior change available to school staff.

TIP

Schoolwide Acknowledgement Systems

Many people think of reinforcement systems like points, prizes, and parties when they hear "PBIS." In fact, **PBIS doesn't require an elaborate points system**. But unless it is already easier for your students to get attention for positive behavior than misbehavior, you need a way to dramatically increase positive interactions. A schoolwide acknowledgment system is critical **because it helps cue the adults to provide attention when kids are doing well**. It's about the adult behavior of noticing the positive; it helps adults to be intentional about creating fun, variety, and a sense of belonging for students.

BLOG

5 PBIS Hacks to Improve School Climate (Including Secondary Schools!)

Common Area Expectations

A significant component of PBIS is clearly communicated expectations for all common areas and schoolwide activities. This is sometimes called a "matrix" because the behavior guidelines are applied to each activity in a chart format. That is one way to do it, but not the only way. As long as the expectations are taught, modeled, practiced, and reinforced, your team has freedom in how you plan and communicate expectations with students and staff.

Most schools find it helpful to build out their set of common area expectations year-to-year, led by the PBIS team:

- Create a list of common areas and activities that need a set of clear expectations

- Prioritize the most important area(s) to do first

- Add additional areas and activities each year

TIP A template ensures you include all the essential features of behavior support in your common area expectations.

See page 11 for an example template created for passing periods. If you are a secondary school administrator, you can't go wrong starting with hallway procedures! Orderly passing periods set up classroom teachers for success, avoiding the disruption of late students, preventing altercations and negative interactions, and adding precious minutes of instruction to the day.

RESOURCE

Campus Behavior Plan Template

Common Area Expectations Example

Common Area/Activity: Passing Periods
Goals: • Reduce tardies by 80%
• Improve positive ratio of interactions to at least 3:1

Student Expectations	Staff Expectations
• Walk in hallways. Follow blue directional arrows at all times.	• Staff with upcoming class: Greeting students, ready to close the door and teach at the bell. • Staff without upcoming class: Present in hallways during entire passing period followed by 3-minute hallway sweep*
• Maintain a conversational voice level. • Use appropriate language.	• Be visible, positive, and focused on students • Calmly and consistently correct identified student behaviors
• Keep hands and objects to yourself. Limit PDA.	• Be heard, but do not scream at, belittle, or humiliate students. We do not yell at students.

Encouragement Procedures:

- Provide friendly, non-contingent attention to students - verbal and non-verbal
- Provide 3 times more interaction with well-behaved students than corrections to misbehaving students
- Periodically hand out "ROAR" tickets for positive behavior
- Students choose passing period music on Friday if tardy goal is met. Otherwise, staff chooses.

Consequences:

- Planned brief reminders - kids should hear the same language over and over. Use our campus "one-liners" to improve consistency and reduce arguing*
- If appropriate, reteach the expectation and have the student demonstrate (For example, go back to the classroom entrance and walk rather than run.)
- If student does not correct behavior, calmly assign a hallway demerit or lunch detention.

Data Collection:

- Weekly report on Thursday afternoon from the digital tardy system
- Twice per month, PBIS team members will observe staff interactions at passing periods

Suggested Resource

Start on Time, Ancora Publishing

Classroom Management

If you are fortunate, your district provides ample training, resources, and ongoing coaching for classroom management. If not, it will be up to your PBIS team to create a sequence of professional learning and follow-up for your staff. It's hard to imagine a bigger impact than a consistent, sustainable approach to classroom management.

TIP

Ask, and ask again, for consistent classroom management learning!

You may have more resources available than you think. Here are several ways I provided classroom management support when district resources were lacking:

💡 **School psychologists**
Most are skilled in this area and would love to provide proactive professional development and consultation.

💡 **State education agencies**
Many offer free or low-cost classroom management programs online and in person.

💡 **Local university graduate programs**
Graduate students, interns, and sometimes even professors themselves are looking for opportunities to serve local schools. Many have classroom experience and behavioral expertise.

💡 **Your own staff**
One of the most successful initiatives I launched was a peer coaching program in which teachers nominated peers they respected to become classroom management coaches for their campus. We provided extensive training for these nominated staff members and they not only provided confidential classroom management coaching, they provided inservice training and new teacher support . . . everyone loved learning from expert teachers that truly understood the challenges.

Learn more about peer coaching:

No Teacher An Island: Deprivatizing the Classroom

Tiered Behavior Interventions

In a multi-tiered support system such as PBIS, the goal is to ensure that every learner gets the instruction and support needed to be successful. Supports are organized into "tiers," from the simplest to the most intensive intervention. At each tier, if a student is not making sufficient progress with research-based interventions, the level or type of support is adjusted to meet the student's needs. A core principle of MTSS/PBIS is to **implement the simplest supports that will work**, saving more intensive efforts for students who truly need it. In other words, prioritize Tier 1 universal supports!

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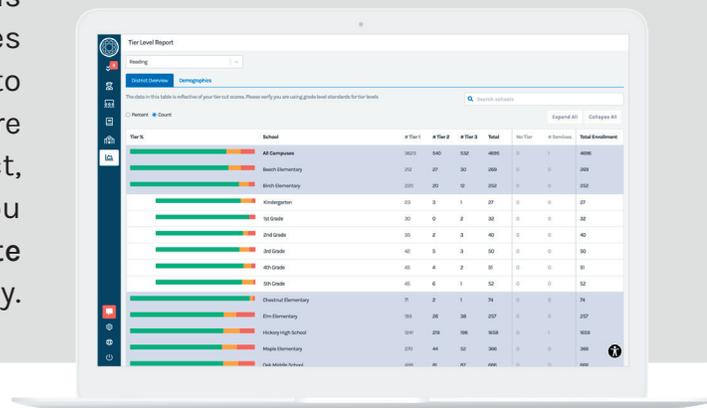
▲ **TIER 1:** **Universal and differentiated** behavior supports provided to all students

▲ **TIER 2:** **Targeted** behavior programs for students needing extra support

▲ **TIER 3:** **Individualized** behavior plans, wrap-around services

Need help setting up your continuum of behavior supports beyond Tier 1?

▲ Tier 2 Behavior Intervention Guide

▲ Tier 3 Behavior Intervention Guide for School Leaders

The Branching Minds MTSS platform provides instant visibility into how behavior needs are distributed at the district, school, or grade level, so you can **set priorities and allocate resources** appropriately.

Branching Minds Tier Level Report

Discipline Policies and Procedures

Even with a strong universal behavior system and great classroom management, behavior problems will occur. **Plan on it!** Minor behaviors are best addressed with differentiated classroom strategies to decrease the need for more intensive interventions. What are the strategies that you expect classroom teachers to use when inevitable behavior problems arise?

TIP

Create a Levels of Misbehavior Chart

It is particularly important that the PBIS team (and eventually the entire staff) discuss and agree on what constitutes a reportable offense, appropriate consequences, what should be handled within the classroom, and what gets handed off to the office! Consistency across the school helps students know what to expect, and helps staff make quick and fair decisions.

	Mild Misbehaviors	Moderate Misbehaviors	Major Misbehaviors
BEHAVIOR	• Talking out • Off task • No homework • Sleeping • Electronic Device • Horseplay (without fear of bodily harm) • Dress Code Violation	• Classroom disruption • Insubordination • Inappropriate language (not directed at adult) • Mild physical aggression • Repeated mild offenses	• Inappropriate language directed at an adult • Severe physical aggression • Threatening language • Horseplay w/fear of bodily harm • Harassment/bullying • Severe disruption • Repeated moderate offenses
CONSEQUENCES	☐ Proximity ☐ Change seating ☐ Verbal reprimand ☐ Signal/gesture ☐ Record misbehavior ☐ Reteach ☐ Pre-correction	*Previous responses plus:* ☐ Conference with teacher ☐ Time Owed ☐ Time Out ☐ Classroom detention ☐ Lunch detention ☐ Loss of privileges ☐ Restitution	*Previous responses plus:* • Office Discipline Referral (ODR) *Administrator assigned only:* • After school detention • Saturday School • Saturday Diversion • In School Suspension • Out of School Suspension • Expulsion
	Staff-managed Document incident in SIS	*Staff-managed* ☐ Document incident in SIS ☐ Notify office of lunch detention	*Office-managed* ☐ Document major incidents in SIS and administrator will respond ☐ Call 5555 for immediate help

Using Behavioral Data for Decision-Making

Your PBIS team will use data at every meeting to plan, evaluate, and celebrate your efforts. You want as much accurate, actionable data as possible.

TIP

Behavior data is not limited to discipline incidents

In fact, some of your most useful data will come from screening, surveys, focus groups, and from direct observation of the learning environment in your school.

Problem-Solving Approach to Behavior

Does your PBIS team have both the **information** and the **process** they need to solve problems? The problem-solving cycle lays out the regular cadence of MTSS work that will move your campus forward, step-by-step:

- Using behavioral data to identify problem areas and determine priorities
- Analyzing specific problems by asking who, what, where, when, and why
- Developing a proactive plan to prevent and address the problem area
- Setting a clear goal, monitoring progress and collecting data
- Evaluating the plan outcomes and starting the cycle over again

PBIS teams need training and support to become effective at data-based decision-making. One model recommended by PBIS.org is Team-Initiated Problem Solving (TIPS). Whatever method you use, a consistent agenda and schedule, along with easily accessible data, make it possible for PBIS teams to collaborate effectively.

MTSS Problem-Solving Cycle

Evaluate Plan Outcomes
Identify the Problem
Analyze the Problem
Develop a Plan
Provide Support + Monitor Progress

Conclusion

PBIS can transform your campus from reactive and punitive to positive and engaging - I've seen it time and again. And if your campus is already enjoying a healthy school climate and relatively few behavior problems, PBIS practices can help you maintain and continue to improve. Everyone in the school environment - students, staff, and parents - benefits from a proactive approach to behavior support.

About the Author

Trudy Bender is the Sr. Manager of Thought Leadership Content at Branching Minds. She has extensive experience as a teacher, school psychologist, and district administrator. She previously served as the Coordinator of District Behavior Intervention for Waco ISD, where she led the district in reducing exclusionary discipline practices and disproportionality. She facilitated the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavior, including initiatives to improve school climate and universal behavior supports, provide effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavior intervention programs, and improve collaboration and access to data with teacher-friendly software tools. She built a multi-year sequence of teacher training in classroom management, behavior intervention, and peer coaching to help build capacity and address teacher turnover. Trudy is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist.

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Appendix: Campus Behavior Plan Template

[Campus Name]
CAMPUS BEHAVIOR PLAN
2024-2025

MTSS and PBIS

A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a collaborative, data-driven framework to ensure that every learner gets the instruction and support they need to be successful. When applied to behavior, this framework is called MTSS-Behavior or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

PBIS is a comprehensive approach to behavior that includes:

- School-wide positive climate
- Clear structure and expectations
- A continuum of behavior interventions
- Data-driven decision-making
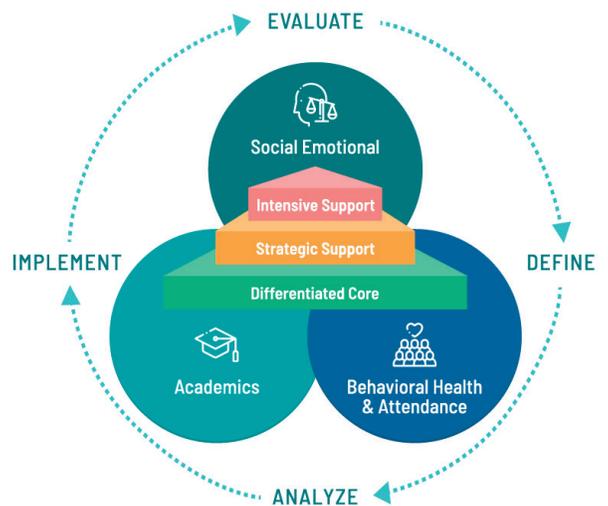
PBIS Leadership Team

Name	Position	Team Role/Meeting Responsibility
Ms. Jones	AP	Administrator / TimeKeeper
Mr. Smith	Counselor	Behavior Expert / Notetaker

Behavioral Framework

Behavior Guidelines

Elements of Effective Behavior Support

- ★ Structure
- ★ Intentional Instruction and Correction
- ★ Positive Relationships
- ★ Data-Driven Decision-Making

How We Create a Positive School Climate

Schoolwide Acknowledgment System

Common Area and Activity Policies and Procedures

Activity/Policy Template *Goal:*	
Student Expectations	**Staff Expectations**
•	•
•	•
•	•
Encouragement Procedures:	
Consequences:	
Data Collection:	
Lesson Plan/Suggestions:	

Classroom Management

Tiered Behavior Intervention System

Screening for Behavior Support

TIER 1: **Universal and differentiated behavior supports** provided to all students

TIER 2: **Targeted behavior programs** for students needing extra support

TIER 3: Individualized behavior plans and wrap-around services

Discipline Policies and Procedures

Early Intervention Strategies

Levels of Misbehavior - Staff Managed vs. Office Managed

Behavior Emergencies

Using Behavioral Data for Decision-Making

Documenting Behavior Incidents and Consequences

Problem-Solving Approach to Behavior

PBIS Team Guidelines

PBIS TEAM GUIDELINES	
Team Meeting Schedule	
Agenda Template	
Action Plan and Archive	
Training	
Term of Service	

MTSS Shouldn't Be So Hard

About Branching Minds

The Branching Minds MTSS software platform pulls together the data, intervention plan details, and progress monitoring tools you need to improve academic AND behavioral outcomes in your district:

☑ **Administer SEL and behavioral screeners**

☑ **Understand behavioral risk and needs** across student, classroom, grade, and school levels using validated cut points

☑ **Create and monitor behavior intervention plans** using evidence-based strategies matched to student needs from the Branching Minds Support Library

☑ **Determine where a system-level response is needed** (staffing, resources, programming) to more effectively meet student needs at any tier level

> ❝ ❞
>
> "I use Branching Minds for one of my biggest things: discipline. I can pull up a student's SEL/behavior health. I can look at their charts that teachers are filling out for their Check in/Check Outs and I can tell parents here's what we're working on with them. It just takes out the gray, and it moves it to black and white."
>
> **- Justin Peterson, Superintendent**
> **Wilber-Clatonia Public Schools, NE**

Branching Minds Student Overview Page
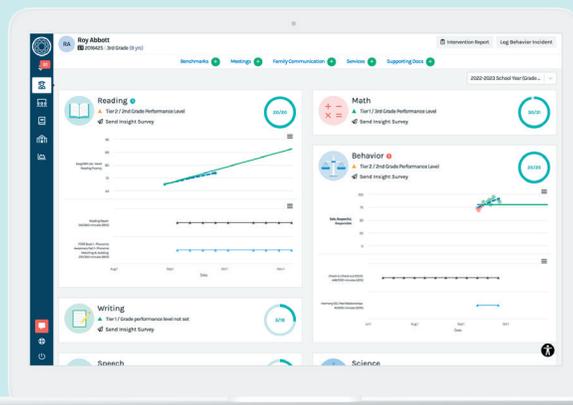
Request a personalized demo today!

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