ILLINOIS PBIS NETWORK

Effective Bully Prevention (BP) within a School-wide System of Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS)

Technical Assistance (TA) Brief ■ December 2010

The presence of bullying behavior in schools can seriously effect the overall school climate and the success and mental health of all students and faculty. Unfortunately, adults have historically underestimated the frequency and impact of this type of behavior (Nansel et. al., 2001). Researchers and practitioners alike recognize that simple solutions, such as stand-alone curriculums or targeting only a subset of students for interventions are not effective. Schools need systemic approaches that noticeably change aspects of the school culture, while also teaching ALL students the skills to meet their social needs without bullying (Olweus, 2003). Multiple levels of intervention and ongoing use of data to guide actions are also identified as critical for impacting issues of school violence such as bullying (Mayer, 2008).

Research studies have shown that implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with fidelity is associated with reductions in problem behavior including aggression, fighting, and harassment; significant increases in the perception of school safety; and the promotion of pro-social behaviors are also noted (Horner, Sugai, Anderson, 2010). Thus schools currently implementing PBIS with fidelity are likely to experience a decrease in behaviors associated with bullying as an effect of their school-wide PBIS efforts. At the same time, the severity of this problem, and the heightened local and national attention toward this issue, reinforces the need to be explicit in how bullying prevention can be embedded in PBIS, and how it can be specifically targeted towards the identified needs of individual schools.

This *Technical Assistance Brief* is intended to inform and support the effective application of bully prevention (BP) through a PBIS framework by: 1) summarizing the current knowledge and recommendations for implementing and sustaining bully prevention initiatives; 2) describing how PBIS provides a framework for effective and sustainable implementation of bully prevention; 3) providing research examples of bully prevention within PBIS; 4) describing how several Illinois schools have begun to integrate bully prevention into their school-wide PBIS system; and 5) summarizing the steps that the Illinois PBIS Network is taking to encourage and support schools to effectively integrate specific bully prevention strategies into their school-wide PBIS system.

INSIDE THIS BRIEF:

- ★ What is the current knowledge for effective bully prevention?
- ★ How does the PBIS framework support efficient and effective bully prevention?
- ★ How does PBIS address the challenges to effective bully prevention?
- ★ What are the results of studies targeting bully prevention within the PBIS framework?
- ★ What is the Illinois PBIS Network doing to encourage the integration of bully prevention into PBIS implementation?

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Visit www.pbis.org to view or download the BP-PBIS Guide.

What is the Current Knowledge Regarding Effective Bully Prevention?

The research and collective understanding of effective bully prevention is still in its infancy, but there are certain program features that consistently show more efficacy. For example, Espelage and Swearer's (2003) research on bullying led them to recommend that bully prevention efforts focus on the social climate of the school and give consideration to the role of the teacher, as well as other adults in the school. They also recommend partnerships with families and the community, and addressing the whole social ecology, including students, schools, families, and communities. Additionally, Espelage and Swearer (2003) point out that some students will need to receive highly individualized support such as Wraparound, a tier 3 intervention within the PBIS continuum that addresses a student's home, school, and community context.

A report by the Consortium to Prevent School Violence (Mayer, 2008) recommended multiple strategies to address school violence, which they defined as also including lower level acts of aggression and bullying. They highlight the lack of effectiveness of reactive and primarily punitive approaches that neither teach nor reinforce appropriate behavior. In the "What DOES Work Well" category, Mayer (2008) includes: intervening early, teaching school-wide behavioral expectations, addressing multiple levels of the student ecology, creating opportunities to practice new behaviors in the contextual setting, and utilizing multiple sources of data for analysis. Also, research by Ma (2002), suggests that one of the characteristics of schools with less bullying is strong parental involvement.

Investigating why so few bully prevention programs have been effective, Ross, Horner, and Stiller (2008) identified three critical issues in those programs that need to be resolved: 1) a difficulty conceptualizing and measuring bullying behavior due to the broad range of features found in the bullying construct, 2) the lack of program maintenance even when interventions have resulted in positive outcomes, and 3) effectively supporting the inclusion of bystanders in bullying intervention efforts. Good, McIntosh, and Piorer's (in press) research in a middle school concluded that bullying prevention programs should be implemented within existing and systemic behavior support efforts for effectiveness and sustainability. They further hypothesized that stand-alone anti-bullying programs may be as likely to exacerbate problems as to solve them, an unintended and negative outcome of some bully prevention programs that has been noted by others as well (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008; U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

The collective research efforts to date strongly point to the need for an effective school-wide framework for systematically implementing and sustaining bully prevention efforts. As has been recently noted about specific character and social/emotional learning programs, sustainable change in student behavior is not achieved by just implementing a selected curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences, 2010). Biggs, Vernverg, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Dill, (2008) note that when stand-alone bullying curriculums are implemented, staff view them as one more task to complete, are not well trained, and are not motivated to implement a curriculum with integrity if they doubt the effectiveness. Findings from Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic (1999), and Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, and Charach (1994) noted that programs involving consistent, school-wide efforts along with the creation of pro-social atmospheres tend to be more effective than programs that implement at the classroom level only or address just the victims and/or bullies involved.

How Does the PBIS Framework Support Efficient and Effective Bully Prevention?

Preventing and decreasing such specific and insidious behavior as bullying requires a systemic approach involving all staff, all students, as well as family/community. A school-wide system of PBIS, with its whole school focus on social climate and behavior change, offers a framework for effectively installing a bully prevention process. Additionally, PBIS has a strong focus on partnering with families and community, a necessary component of effective bully prevention efforts. Ross et al., (2008) identified six key features of PBIS as ideal components of effective bully prevention which are summarized in Figure 1 below.

The evidence base of PBIS effectively addresses the recommended features of bully prevention, while attending to the drawbacks noted in past and current bully prevention efforts and programs. These PBIS features include instruction of specific pro-social behaviors that are both observable and measurable; a systemic prevention focus; and ongoing evaluation of fidelity, as well as outcomes. It is also important to note that PBIS focuses on the practical application of research, and therefore moves theory to practice in a manner that is both economical and sustainable, thus enabling bully prevention efforts to be efficient and durable.

Schools currently implementing PBIS have an established multi-tiered structure for preventing, as well as remediating, problem behaviors associated with bullying. Universal/tier 1 defines and teaches school-wide behavioral expectations to all students and adults and includes modeling, practicing, acknowledging, and re-teaching as indicated by data. Schools implementing universal/tier 1 PBIS with fidelity typically experience lower levels of bullying behavior because they have created a climate in which appropriate social skills are the norm. This creates a predictable and positive social culture where bullying behaviors are less likely to be reinforced. Ongoing data review by trained teams allows for early access to scaled-up interventions for students with higher levels of need. Additional support at secondary/tier 2 includes interventions such as Check-in Check-Out, mentoring, structured peer supports, or quick/brief function-based behavior support plans. Additional tertiary/tier 3 interventions, including complex function-based behavior support plans and wraparound, are available to students and their families who need the most support.

Figure 1

Key Features of Bully Prevention in PBIS

From *Ross, Horner, and Stiller (2008)**

1. The use of empirically-tested instructional principles to teach expected behavior outside the classroom to all students.
2. The monitoring and acknowledgement of students for engaging in appropriate behavior outside the classroom.
3. Specific instruction and pre-correction to prevent bullying behavior from being rewarded by victims or bystanders.
4. The correction of problem behaviors using a consistently administered continuum of consequences.
5. The collection and use of information about student behavior to evaluate and guide decision-making.
6. The establishment of a team that develops, implements, and manages the BP-PBIS effort.

**BP in PBS* @ *www.pbis.org*,

How Does PBIS Address the Challenges to Effective Bully Prevention?

1) Conceptualizing and Measuring Bullying Behavior. Defining and evaluating bullying behavior is difficult but necessary as a first step in building an effective prevention and intervention system. School personnel often get side-tracked by the broad definition and the power dynamics of bullying behavior, thus limiting the effectiveness of their efforts. Because PBIS focuses on improvement of behaviors that are clearly defined, observable, and measurable, schools using this process can move quickly to effective bully prevention. Ross et al. (2008) point out that "…the definitions of these behaviors should not speculate on the intent of the behavior, the power of the individuals involved, or the frequency of its occurrence… Reducing peer maintained problem behavior outside the classroom is the main goal of bully prevention within the PBIS framework, and the reduction of 'bullying' behaviors is a sub-set of this process" (ch. 8. p. 4). Additionally, schools implementing universal/tier 1 PBIS define problem behaviors, determine which will be classroom managed or office referred, and establish a process for handling each category, thereby creating a systemic, cohesive, and consistent practice when responding to problem behaviors.

Other data used within PBIS includes tools for assessing school climate, implementation fidelity, identifying school needs, and tools to guide planning and decision-making. Measures of school climate and staff/student perception of school safety are also available. Data systems such as the School-wide Information System (SWIS) provide efficient monitoring of office discipline referrals (ODRs) for data-based decision-making. The three SWIS ODR categories that can be used for assessing a range of bullying behavior include *physical aggression, fighting,* and *harassment/bullying*. It is important to note that, because bullying behavior is not always seen by adults, additional tools for assessing student report of harassment/bullying frequency may also be needed.

2) Sustaining Bullying Prevention Efforts. As with other stand alone curriculums (i.e., character and social/emotional learning programs), bully prevention programs not launched within a school-wide systemic framework will likely fail to have the desired effect (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences, 2010). Ross et al. (2008) note that despite some initial positive program outcomes, few bullying programs continue to produce similar results even two years later. Studies of school-wide PBIS implementation have consistently shown sustained effect over time for fidelity of implementation, reduction in problem behavior, and improved measures of school safety (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). The features of PBIS, which contribute to these positive results sustaining over time, include: research-based instruction of specific and measurable behaviors, implementation across all settings, and continuous team-based monitoring of fidelity and outcomes.

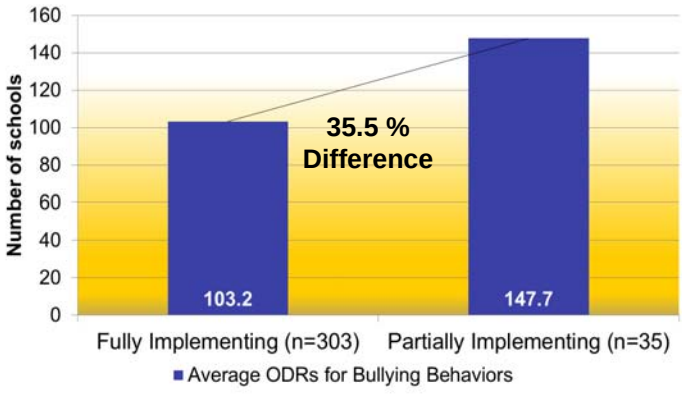
3) Addressing the Roles of Bully, Victim, and Bystander. Bullying typically includes the roles of a student or students displaying bullying behavior, victims, and bystanders. Ignoring the role of the bystander (including students and adults who witnesses bullying) allows the perpetrator to continue to receive reinforcement for their inappropriate behavior (Ross & Horner, 2009). Simply relying on reactive approaches to bullying—more rules, increasing severity of consequences for misbehavior—often tend to escalate problem behavior (Simonsen et al., 2008). Training adults and students on the dynamics of bullying and teaching specific behavioral expectations for handling bullying allows for the cycle of reinforcement of the bully to be interrupted (Ross et al., 2008). The Bully Prevention PBIS (BP-PBIS) Curriculum (Ross et al., 2008) provides specific behavioral lessons to proactively train victims, bystanders, and perpetrators. An integral part of implementation is that adults report incidents and also support the victim. Victims and bystanders are further reinforced for using the three-step response of stop-walk-talk. Schools fluent with PBIS systems and practices can easily integrate these lessons into their multi-tiered behavioral support system.

How are Illinois Schools Embedding Bully Prevention through the PBIS Framework?

A review of Illinois school office discipline referrals (ODRs) for bullying data indicates that Illinois schools implementing PBIS with fidelity experience fewer behaviors associated with bullying. Specifically, schools achieving fidelity through the Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) or the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) in 2009-10, (n=303) had an average of 103.2 ODRs for bullying behaviors, while partially implementing schools, (n=35) had an average of 147.7 ODRs for bullying behaviors, a 43% difference. This data (Figure 2 below) suggests that schools that were further developed in implementing universal/tier 1 PBIS with integrity have the systems framework needed for teaching students alternatives to bullying behaviors. Clarifying how both adults and students should handle reporting such behaviors also contributed to a lower level of bullying behaviors in the schools fully implementing PBIS.

FY10 Average ODRs for Behaviors Associated with Bullying in Illinois PBIS Schools

Comparison of Fully & Partially Implementing Schools



Results from Studies Targeting Bully Prevention within the PBIS Framework

To evaluate the initial effectiveness of the BP-PBIS curriculum, a pilot study was conducted in an Oregon elementary school during the 2007-08 school year (Ross, Horner & Stiller, 2008). Observations were conducted on three students as selected by the principal, along with a composite peer during lunch recess. Results indicated a significant reduction (55-69%) in problem behavior after the intervention. In addition, other students on the playground were significantly more likely to respond appropriately when they were bullied. This change in how students respond to bullying behaviors indicates that the school culture has changed.

After initial implementation of PBIS in the 2007-08 school year, a middle school of 500 students in Canada targeted bullying prevention within the PBIS framework during the 2008-09 school year (Good, McIntosh, Poirier, in press). Suspensions dropped about 65% after implementing PBIS for two years. After targeting bullying prevention, ODRs for bullying at the school decreased by 41%.

An Illinois School Example
Applying Bully Prevention within a PBIS System

At the end of the 2009-10 school year, the staff at **Highland Elementary, in SD U-46 in Elgin** identified that 57% of the school's office discipline referrals (ODRs) for the year had been a result of behaviors associated with bullying. The school identified the curriculum guide *Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support* (Ross et al., 2008), as their guide to embed bully prevention within their existing PBIS systems. Highland staff was trained in the program components at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year including the dynamics of bullying behavior, and the relationships between the bully, the victim, and the bystanders. Staff also discussed which incidents of bullying behaviors would be handled in the classroom and which would be referred to the office. During the first two weeks of the school year, Highland students completed five instructional sessions specifically designed to prevent bullying behaviors by teaching social responsibility skills and a "stop/walk/talk" approach for students to apply in different scenarios. During the training, students were taught how to use the "stop" verbal command to deter the student that is making them feel unsafe, and how to respond to the stop prompt. The victim is taught to "walk-away" if the perpetrator persists. Finally, if the negative behavior continues, the victim is taught to report the incident ("talk") to an adult. The adults in the school were trained how to respond when the student "talks". The Highland staff shared the bully prevention program embedded in their PBIS system with parents at the Fall Open House, and at the October *Parent Education and Family Fun* night held at the YMCA.

A data collection system was put in place for the school to keep track of all incidents of bullying behavior, defined as when a student continues the negative behavior after the victim has tried to "stop" and "walk." The adult verifies the report and then fills out a brief tracking form that includes: the name of the person reporting the incident, the name of the perpetrator, the adult's name, and the date. The adult may also complete an ODR if they feel it is warranted. All of the bullying behavior reports are entered into a spreadsheet that is reviewed to identify trends.

By collecting this supplemental data, the school team was able to identify a student who didn't have any major or minor ODRs, and was not on Check-in/Check-out * (CICO), but was exhibiting bullying behaviors based on multiple student reports. Because of their vigilant use of data, they were able to put secondary interventions in place to address this student's needs more quickly than is typical for this behavior, which is hard to detect in early stages.

> * ***Check-in/Check-out (CICO)*** *is a tier 2 intervention that builds upon a school's tier 1 systems by providing some students a higher frequency of scheduled, positive feedback from adults, regarding the school-wide behavior expectations.*

Students with multiple reports for bullying behaviors receive a targeted re-teaching of both the school-wide expectations and the lessons from the bully prevention curriculum. These students also participate in the tier 2 CICO system where staff members provide structured "Check-ins" with selected students and monitor effectiveness using *Daily Progress Report* (DPR) points. The number of reports that are made on the student for bullying behaviors is also monitored. Measures of impact being used to assess progress also include school-wide behavior data such as ODRs on all students, DPRs for some targeted students, and individual behavior monitoring for a few students. Measures of school safety and climate are also being considered to guide sustainability.

A District Plan Example

CUSD 300, in Carpentersville

Step #1

CUSD 300 leaders began addressing bully prevention (BP) by organizing a district task force. Because PBIS internal coaches were also working on the same issue, the district external coach joined the district BP committee, along with administrators, parents, and support staff.

Step #2

The district task force decided to take advantage of the established PBIS structures to ensure a multi-layered approach. They began to look at how to efficiently blend BP strategies and lessons into their existing multi-tiered behavior support system.

Step #3

They developed a district-level "map" identifying how evidence-based BP practices, including data, will fit with existing Response to Intervention (RtI) plans to ensure the most efficient and long-term results.

Step #4

Although full implementation of the CUSD 300 BP-PBIS plan is scheduled to begin during 2011-12, many of the schools have already started integrating BP-PBIS through their existing school-wide behavior instruction.

What is the Illinois PBIS Network Doing to Encourage the Integration of Bully Prevention into PBIS Implementation?

By investing in PBIS, schools and districts will be able to efficiently embed bully prevention within existing school-wide pro-social systems of support, thus increasing sustainable effects over time. The multi-tiered structures will expedite more focused interventions for those students who have higher level needs with respect to bullying behavior. To support these efforts, the Illinois PBIS Network is taking the following steps to inform and support schools and districts in their bully prevention initiatives:

- On May 11th, 2011, the Illinois PBIS Network will host a statewide forum on bully prevention for Illinois PBIS principals, coaches, and district administrators in partner and demonstration districts. Dr. Rob Horner, National PBIS TA Center, and Dr. Dorothy Espelage, University of Illinois and member of the ISBE Bully Prevention Task Force, will be key speakers at this forum.
- Through direct coaching with district leadership teams, and in regionally-held district summits, the Network is encouraging a district level approach to bully prevention as a model for sustainability.
- The Network is actively reviewing additional tools to efficiently measure climate and perception data associated with bullying behaviors. The Network will partner with demonstration districts to determine the use and effectiveness of the tools.
- The Network ensures that State and National PBIS Leadership Forums and Conferences in Illinois include sessions on implementing bully prevention within PBIS. Dr. George Sugai, Co-director National PBIS Center, University of Connecticut, will present a plenary on this topic at the January 2011, Illinois PBIS Leadership Forum in O'Fallon, Illinois.
- Illinois PBIS Network quarterly newsletters and website will feature 'learning examples' of schools and districts implementing bully prevention as well as access to resource materials for schools. The Illinois PBIS Network January 2011 *Update* Newsletter will also reference the free BP-PBIS manuals available online for additional tools and strategies.

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About the Illinois PBIS Network

The Illinois PBIS Network is the Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports component of the Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Center (ISTAC) - an Illinois State Board of Education funded initiative promoting effective practices to benefit all children.

The Illinois PBIS Network builds capacity of schools, families, and communities to promote social and academic success of all students, including those with emotional/behavioral and other disabilities. Key focus areas of the Illinois PBIS Network include:

- **Prevention-based** school-wide systems of positive behavior support
- **Data-based decision-making** for instruction of behavior and academics
- **Wraparound planning** for students with complex emotional/behavioral needs & their families
- **Community-based** supports for families, youth & schools

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