This document is intended to be a practical tool and resource for educators interested in implementing, sustaining, or enhancing PBIS in the classroom practices. The concepts, strategies, and resources included in this document were drawn from sessions and presentations focused on PBIS in the classroom at the 2015 APBS conference in Rosemont, Illinois. Specifically, core features and issues related to PBIS in the classroom implementation are explored including: critical elements of PBIS in the classroom, foundational practices, systems to support implementation, relevant outcomes, barriers to effective implementation, and strategies to address barriers.

Critical Elements of PBIS in the Classroom

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a framework for delivering universal (whole-school) and additional tiers of behavior support to improve educational outcomes for all students (Horner & Sugai, 2015). As a student needs an increasing amount of support, the interventions at each tier of the PBIS model become increasingly intensive. Tier 1 of the PBIS framework focuses on supporting all students with high quality implementation of evidence-based interventions and prevention of academic and behavioral difficulties. In schools that effectively implement PBIS, 80% or more of students will respond to Tier 1 supports without additional intervention. Tier 2 of the PBIS framework focuses on targeted interventions for students not responding to Tier 1 supports. In schools that effectively implement PBIS, 10-15% of students may need Tier 2 level intervention in addition to Tier 1. For students who do not respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 targeted interventions, Tier 3 interventions are put in place. Tier 3 interventions are intensive and individualized. In schools that effectively implement PBIS, approximately 5% of students may require Tier 3 level of intervention.

The PBIS framework has significant implications for the classroom environment. PBIS in the classroom, or Positive Classroom Behavioral Supports (PCBS), refers to positive and proactive classroom management supports for all students. This includes effectively teaching an evidence-based core curriculum and establishing, teaching, and reinforcing positive behavioral expectations. When students do not respond to agreed upon classroom expectations, teachers respond to student behaviors in a way that maintains respect and a focus on instruction. In classrooms where PBIS is implemented effectively, the environment is predictable, consistent, and conducive to academic and behavioral success. The sections below describe critical elements of PBIS in the classroom including (1) core practices for implementation, (b) systems to support teachers with implementation, and (3) relevant outcomes. Common barriers to implementing PBIS in the classroom and strategies to address barriers are also explored.

Practices

To effectively and efficiently implement PBIS in the classroom, there are commonly agreed upon foundational practices that need to be put in place. These practices focus on establishing a safe and predictable classroom structure and positive teacher-student interactions. Ideally, PBIS practices in the classroom are aligned with school-wide PBIS systems. For example, if the school-wide expectations are respect, responsibility, and safety, the classroom expectations are also respect, responsibility, and safety. However, classroom expectations may be operationalized in a way to fit the unique context of the classroom. If school-wide PBIS is not in place, PBIS in the classroom can still be implemented by developing a class-wide system for teaching expectations, acknowledging student behavior, responding to rule violations, making classroom management decision based on classroom behavioral data, and using effective instructional strategies with fidelity (Goodman & Theisz, 2015). Foundational practices of PBIS in the classroom are summarized in Table 1, and each practice is briefly described below.
Design physical environment of the classroom

Implementing foundational practices of PBIS in the classroom begins with effectively designing the physical environment of the classroom (Simonsen & Freeman, 2015). Creating a structured physical environment includes organizing desks and tables according to the activity students will be participating in. For example, tables may be used for centers and group work, separated desks may be used for independent work, and a circle or U-shaped area may be used for whole class discussion. The physical layout of the classroom should also minimize crowding and distractions, and students should know where, when, and how to store personal possessions, get supplies, and turn in work (Goodman & Theisz, 2015).

Establish classroom routines

In addition to considering the physical layout, teachers should develop predictable classroom routines for the classroom teacher and all students. This process starts with the teacher developing a common schedule to guide activities during their period (e.g., warm up, teacher directed instruction, small group work, independent practice, wrap up) or day (e.g., warm up, whole group reading, and so on). In addition, teachers should develop a predictable pattern for how they would like students to move through common classroom routines, including transitions between activities, accessing help, what to do after work completion, and lining up.

Establish classroom expectations

The third foundational practice for PBIS in the classroom is to develop, define, post, and teach 3-5 positively stated classroom expectations (Goodman & Theisz, 2015). To increase buy in, students may be actively involved in developing and defining expectations conducive to a safe and productive classroom environment. Posters of the expectations can be displayed in multiple areas of the classroom and engaging lessons and activities can be used to explicitly teach what the expectations look like and sound like (Scott, 2015). Students should also be given multiple and ongoing opportunities to practice classroom expectations.

Teach classroom expectations within classroom routines

After classroom routines and expectations are defined, teachers should teach how students engage in expected behavior during predictable classroom routines. Routines should incorporate the 3-5 agreed upon expectations established by the teacher and students. A classroom matrix can be used to develop and teach classroom routines. For example, the column titles of the matrix can list common routines (e.g., transitioning from a group meeting area to independent desk work or asking for help) and the row titles can list the classroom expectations (e.g., Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe). Expected behavior for specific routines and classroom expectations can then be filled in for each box of the matrix. Once the matrix is developed, teachers should explicitly teach each expectation within each routine using an explicit (model-lead-test) approach. Then, they should provide on-going support for expected behavior within classroom routines by clarifying teacher prompts to initiate routines, reinforcing expected behavior, and implementing clear and consistent consequences for rule violations (Goodman & Theisz, 2015; Simonsen & Freeman, 2015).

Reinforce expectations

Developing and teaching classroom expectations and routines are foundational practices of PBIS in the classroom. In addition, the established expectations need to be reinforced to increase the likelihood that students will consistently demonstrate the expected behaviors. Acknowledgement of student behavior should be specific and age appropriate. For example, when a student uses the agreed upon participation strategy, the
teacher can acknowledge the student by saying “Thank you for raising your hand.” In addition to verbal acknowledgement, acknowledging student behavior may also incorporate a school-wide reinforcement system or an established classroom-level reinforcement system (e.g., tally sheets on desks or white board or group points (Simonsen & Freeman, 2015). It is recommended that classroom teachers acknowledge positive student behavior at least five times more often than they acknowledge student problem (i.e., 5:1 ratio) (Borgmeier, Freeman, Mitchell, & Simonsen, 2015). Teachers can use self-monitoring strategies to assess, plan, and monitor their own behavior to increase positive behavior acknowledgement. For example, teachers can use a golf counter or tally marks on a white board or sticky note to record positive behavior acknowledgement frequency.

Respond to problem behavior

Responding to problem behavior is also essential to implementing PBIS in the classroom. Similar to classroom expectations, consequences for classroom rule violations should be aligned with school-wide consequences, respectful, age appropriate, clearly defined and taught, and enforced consistently. Responses to problem behavior should be brief, specific to the problem behavior, and delivered with a calm and neutral voice. In addition, teachers should maintain an instructional focus when responding to problem behavior. That is, teachers may think about how they correct an academic error, and use a similar procedure to correct to behavioral errors. In their response, they should signal the error, remind the student of the appropriate behavior, and provide an opportunity to practice the behavior correctly and receive reinforcement (e.g., after a talk-out, teacher says “Remember to raise your hand if you’d like to ask a question.” Student raises hand, teacher calls on student, and says “Thanks for raising your hand, what is your question?”). In addition to an error correction, teachers may consider the following strategies to respond to problem behavior: planned ignoring, differential strategies, response cost, and time out from class activities (Simonsen & Freeman, 2015).

Engage students

Designing the physical environment of the classroom and establishing behavior expectations and routines creates predictability and consistency for students. Engaging students during academic instruction is also used to reduce problem behaviors and improve academic instruction. Strategies to engage students include providing high quality academic instruction with content matched to student needs, providing frequent feedback to students, using instruction time productively, connecting teaching to students lives, and giving students frequent opportunities to respond (Goodman & Theisz, 2015). Giving students frequent opportunities to respond correctly makes learning immediately observable and provides students with the repetition necessary for skill acquisition (Swain-BRADWAY, Lewis, & Frerks, 2015). To increase students’ opportunities to respond to instruction, classroom teachers can follow brief teacher led instruction with independent, paired, and small group practice opportunities (Swain-BRADWAY, Lewis, & Frerks, 2015). Teachers can also ask questions and use students’ answers to drive instruction and vary the way in which students respond (e.g., group responses, individual responses, raise hand or use signal to indicate agreement, demonstrations, draw student names from jar) (Scott, 2015).
Table 1

**Foundational Practices of PBIS in the Classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design Physical Environment</td>
<td>- Organize desks and tables according to the activity students will be participating in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Minimize crowding and distractions</td>
<td>Separated desks for independent work, tables for group work, circle or U-shaped area for whole class discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish Routines</td>
<td>- Identify common classroom routines</td>
<td>Clear procedures for transitions, accessing materials, getting help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish Expectations</td>
<td>- Develop, define, post, and teach 3-5 positively stated expectation</td>
<td>Be respectful, be responsible, be safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Expectations within Routines</td>
<td>- Use matrix to teach class routines</td>
<td>Students show respect and responsibility by flipping card on desk to ask for help during independent academic work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop and teach explicit lesson plans on each expectation within each routine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforce Expectations</td>
<td>- Immediate</td>
<td>“Thank you for quietly flipping your card to ask for help and moving on to the next problem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Specific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Age appropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to Problem Behavior</td>
<td>- Brief</td>
<td>“I noticed you started talking to your neighbor when you got stuck on your work, what is a better way to ask for help during independent work time?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Specific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Calm and neutral voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage Students</td>
<td>- High quality instruction aligned with student needs</td>
<td>Students respond as whole group during teacher led instruction, followed by paired practice while teacher monitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Frequent opportunities to respond</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see the document “Supporting and Responding to Student Behavior” on pbis.org for further information about positive classroom behavior support practices.

**Systems to Support Teacher Implementation**

Support for teachers’ implementing PBIS in the classroom is typically provided in collaboration with a PBIS coach or another staff member with expertise in PBIS implementation. Processes for supporting teachers’ implementation of PBIS in the classroom include (1) assessment of current practices and routines, (2) feedback and consultation, (3) implementation of new strategies or adjustment to existing practices, and measurement of effectiveness. For more detailed descriptions of example consultation models see Reinke,
Assessment of current practices and routines involves collecting data using an observation checklist or teacher self-assessment focused on measuring the extent to which core features of PBIS in the classroom are implemented. Although PBIS in the classroom measures vary in terms of format, most measures focus on core features that lead to safe and productive learning environments. Table 2 describes examples of PBIS in the classroom measures. It is important to note that the list of measures in Table 2 was generated from presentations and sessions at the 2015 APBS conference and is therefore not exhaustive. Those using the measures should also note that most measures have not been statistically tested for reliability and validity. It is highly recommended that consultation, collaboration, and action planning occur before, during, and after the use of PBIS in the classroom measures.

**Relevant Outcomes**

Implementing the foundational practices of PBIS in the classroom listed in Table 1 contributes to a variety of positive outcomes for students in classroom settings (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). For example, high quality academic instruction that includes matching content to student success level, providing students with frequent opportunities to respond, and giving students frequent, positive, and specific feedback on skill acquisition has contributed to decreases in major office discipline referrals (Goodman & Theisz, 2015; Swain-Bradway, Lewis, & Frerks, 2015). The extent to which teachers use the foundational practices also impacts perception of their skill and their emotional well-being. Teachers using higher rates of praise toward students also reported having higher levels of self-efficacy related to classroom management, whereas teachers using higher rates of reprimands report higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2012). Encouraging outcomes can also be seen when foundational PBIS practices are applied to group contingency interventions in the classroom. For example, teachers using the CW-FIT group contingency intervention to teach and reinforce classroom expectations increased their use of praise and decreased their use of reprimands while seeing an increase of on task behavior, increase of engagement, and decrease of disruptive behaviors among students (Willis & Casey, 2015).
## Example PBIS in the Classroom Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Core Features Measured</th>
<th>Intended Use</th>
<th>Psychometric Properties</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### PBIS Leadership Forum- Roundtable Dialogue

|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
Barriers to Effective Implementation

Common barriers persist across districts, schools, and classrooms, and often fall under the categories of staff training and staff buy-in. The following barriers may exist when planning or implementing PBIS in the classroom:

District level barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation may include:

- Support, time, commitment, and funding are not invested into developing an implementation framework that gives individual schools the support needed for PBIS practices to reach all classroom teachers and students.
- PBIS in the classroom is not made a district-wide priority, including systematic district-wide staff training and development opportunities.
- District support staff with expertise in PBIS and student behavior, including a district leadership team, are not assembled to provide ongoing coaching and training to building level staff.

School level barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation may include:

- School-wide implementation of PBIS in the classroom is not made a school-wide priority. This includes adding implementation of PBIS in the classroom to school-wide goals and school improvement plans.
- Classroom teachers, support staff, and administrators do not receive pre-service and in-service training specific to classroom management and PBIS in the classroom.
- Time is not allocated for school staff to meet, plan, and monitor PBIS in the classroom implementation.
- Administration, classroom teachers, and support staff who do not buy-in to PBIS in the classroom practices and implementation with fidelity.
- Building level staff are not supported by external coaching, or there is a lack of internal coaching due to FTE allocation or limited personnel with PBIS and behavioral expertise.

Classroom level barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation may include:

- Classroom teachers do not receive pre-service and ongoing in-service training specific to classroom management and PBIS in the classroom.
- Classroom teachers are not supported by external or internal coaching due to FTE allocation or limited personnel with PBIS and behavioral expertise.
- Classroom teachers do not buy-in to PBIS in the classroom practices and implementation with fidelity.
- Students demonstrate challenging behavior or lack of motivation.

Despite potential barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation, educators can use specific strategies to address and move beyond barriers to implementation. A common theme among strategies to overcome barriers to implementation is contextual fit. Therefore, for PBIS in the classroom to be effective and efficient, strategies used should fit within the context of the classroom in which the strategies will be implemented. Considerations should include the teachers strengths and experience and the needs of the students. Strategies to address and move beyond barriers to implementation include:

District-level strategies to address barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation may include:

- Establish district level PBIS leadership team and make PBIS in the classroom a component of the district-wide PBIS implementation framework.
District level professional development planning should include identifying need for PBIS in classrooms across the district and making ongoing training for PBIS in the classroom implementation a priority.

Determine and prioritize the practices that will be emphasized and taught first. For example, the school district may decide to address universal classroom-wide practices first to establish PBIS in the classroom across the district and because classroom-wide PBIS practices reach all students in the classroom.

Allocate appropriate personnel to coaching roles.

For additional resources for district level PBIS implementation, see:


OSEP Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. District Level PBIS. http://www.pbis.org/school/district-level

School-level strategies to address barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation may include:

- Make PBIS in the classroom a priority and determine school-wide focus (e.g., providing positive feedback to students, improving ratio of positive feedback to corrective feedback)
- Increase buy-in and competency by providing ongoing training opportunities with a multi-tiered framework of professional development support. This process includes Tier 1 universal professional development for all classroom teachers and support staff focused on self-assessment of practices in place, implementing foundational practices, and self-management. Tier 2 targeted professional development includes the addition of coaching supports, and Tier 3 professional development involves intensive professional development with data-driven consultation
- Increase buy-in and collaboration by allocating appropriate time for school staff to meet, plan, and monitor PBIS in the classroom implementation. This includes allocation of time for building level PBIS teams to meet regularly to set goals and review data; grade level teams to set goals, share effective strategies, and monitor outcomes; and whole staff meeting time that includes regular opportunities for professional development, collaboration, and data review related to PBIS in the classroom
- Regularly consult with district level external coaches and identify internal coaches with expertise in PBIS and student behavior
- Guiding questions for PBIS in the classroom action planning:
  1) Are the foundations of PBIS in the classroom in place for all staff?
     - Do all staff receive explicit professional development on PBIS in the classroom practices?
     - Do all staff receive coaching and performance feedback on PBIS in the classroom implementation?
     - Do all staff receive acknowledgement for their PBIS in the classroom implementation?
  2) Are proactive supplemental supports available for staff who are likely to need them (including new teachers and teachers with difficult classes)?
Are there induction or mentoring supports for new teachers?
Is there a plan for preventing and addressing staff turnover?
Are additional coaching supports available?

3) Do data indicate that staff are implementing PBIS in the classroom with fidelity? (Use decision-making framework to determine needs based on data)

For additional resources on multi-tiered frameworks of professional development, see:


Classroom level strategies to address barriers to PBIS in the classroom implementation may include:

- Provide ongoing training opportunities with a multi-tiered framework of professional development support. This process includes Tier 1 universal professional development for all classroom teachers and support staff focused on self-assessment of practices in place, implementing foundational practices, and self-management. Tier 2 targeted professional development includes the addition of coaching supports, and Tier 3 professional development involves intensive professional development with data-driven consultation
- Establish a framework for teachers to participate in ongoing and regularly scheduled consultation with district and building level coaches with expertise in PBIS and student behavior. This includes establishing a process for teachers to access support for PBIS in the classroom implementation or challenging classroom behavior when needed
- Provide teachers with ongoing implementation feedback and data from scheduled observation. Teacher self-management strategies and data should be used to highlight improvements and action plan for areas in need of support. Whole staff data should be regularly shared with staff to track improvements and progress
- Use group contingency strategies to increase student engagement and motivation and decrease problem behavior. This includes (1) directly teaching skills students need to meet behavior expectation, (2) providing students with opportunities to practice skills, (3) pre-corrections at the beginning of instruction, (4) organizing small groups of students into teams, (5) setting daily point goals, (6) regular timed reinforcement of expected behavior with points, and (7) reinforcement activity or privilege given at end of class for groups meeting goal
- For additional resources for PBIS in the classroom, see:


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**Additional resources and references**


