



Using PBIS to Lower Learning Distractions and Build Greater Organizational Health in Schools

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Outside of the home, schools are the primary place in which children ages 5-18 spend most of their time. It's important for students to feel safe, to learn with limited distractions, and have positive relationships with all faculty members.

Disruptive school behavior doesn't just affect that individual child's learning, but also their peers as well as the school

community. The goal of this study was to determine the effect of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) whole-school prevention model on a school's behavioral, social learning, and organizational behavioral principles. The prevention model shows positive impacts in all these areas along with its overall organizational health.



Figure 1 Photo by Yan Krukau: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/children-sitting-on-chairs-in-front-of-table-with-art-materials-8613059/> Pexels. CCO.

Highlights

PBIS has shown effectiveness in Maryland elementary schools.

The effectiveness of PBIS is higher in schools starting with lower organizational health scores.

PBIS can be applied in other settings; but effectiveness is not yet known.

Methods

This study was conducted between 2002 and 2007 and involved 37 Maryland public elementary schools from five different school districts. Twenty-six of these schools were randomized to the PBIS intervention condition while the remaining 16 schools were randomized to the comparison condition. School staff completed a questionnaire consisting of 29 items called the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET). The SET was scored on a three point scale organized into seven subscales to represent the seven key features of the PBIS model rated each spring by an independent trained rater.

The demographic characteristics of the school itself were measured by the State's Department of Education, and the organizational health of the school was measured using the Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools (OHI).

Results

- There was a significant positive intervention effect on overall OHI, resource influence, staff affiliation, and academic emphasis.
- There were no significant differences in SET scores between the PBIS condition and comparison condition.
- Schools with lower levels of organizational health at baseline benefited the most from the PBIS model.
- The lack of a standardized PBIS training format, intensity, and duration likely contributes to variations in both the implementation quality and outcomes.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychology places a high importance on the relationship between individuals and the community and context around them. In the study, the researchers wanted to find ways in which they could improve the schools' organizational health which includes relationships among the staff, respect for all members of the school community, family and community involvement, and support of leadership. School systems are also a reflection of their community meaning it highlights the community's values, beliefs, and attitudes, ultimately affecting a child's development.

“Changes in school organizational health are important consequences of the PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] whole-school prevention model and may in turn be a potential contextual mediator of the effect of PBIS on student performance.”

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: By limiting referrals, suspensions, and other disciplinary punishments, there was an improvement of students' academic success along with a sense of greater overall trust and safety. Future research on the PBIS model should assess the effectiveness in other settings like middle and high schools and universities.

Practice: For schools wanting to implement the PBIS prevention model, this study suggests that schools that have low organizational health are the ones that benefit the most from this model. The majority of schools would most likely benefit in some way.

Similar Settings: In addition to schools, this information can be useful for people working in applied settings such as nonprofit organizations, healthcare, and the government. Non-profits can use the information from this PBIS intervention model and apply it to children who have behavioral issues. Those in the healthcare field can apply this same information to childcare centers. Similarly, government agencies like the Department of Education could mend existing school education requirements to implement PBIS to schools across the US.

*Original Citation: Bradshaw, C. P., Koth, C. W., Thornton, L. A., & Leaf, P. J. (2009). Altering school climate through school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: Findings from a group-randomized effectiveness trial. *Prevention Science*, 10(2), 100–115.*

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