


2014

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Recommended Citation

Mershon, Tara, "Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): Lessons Learned from the Implementation Process of an Evidence-Based Program" (2014). *All Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*. 886.
<https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/886>

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MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO



Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS): Lessons Learned from the Implementation Process of an Evidence-Based Program

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Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to assess the implementation process of PBIS in rural, consolidated school districts in southern Minnesota. The ideals of PBIS are in line with GFW Schools mission to foster lifelong learners in a caring environment. GFW schools aspire to promote positive social and emotional behavior and provide all students with a quality education to prepare them for future educational experiences. The recommendations from this project will inform the implementation of PBIS in the GFW School District, which is occurring in the 2014-2016 academic years.

Methodology

Following an extensive literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff from seven rural school districts that recently implemented PBIS. The interviews focused on understanding the strengths and challenges of the implementation process. All seven interviews were conducted in person and took place between May-June 2014. All participants consented to their interview being audio recorded, which allowed all feedback to be transcribed verbatim for comparison & data analysis. This project was approved by the MNSU IRB.

The following school districts from Minnesota SW-PBIS Schools: Cohorts 5-8 participated in the study:

- Blue Earth Area Schools
- Mankato Area Schools
- New Ulm Public Schools; Jefferson Elementary
- Nicollet Schools
- St. Peter Middle/High School
- United South Central Public Schools
- Waterville-Elysian-Morristown Public School

What is PBIS?

- PBIS is a framework for schools to develop, monitor, and maintain academic and social outcomes for all students.
- A school is considered ready to begin the implementation of PBIS when 80% or more of the school staff is willing to commit and adopt this framework.
- Staff must commit to teach pro-social behavior, collect data to assist in decision-making, collaborate with families & stakeholders, and create individualized approaches with students who have more intensive needs.
- The aim of PBIS is to reduce the development of new problem behaviors by implementing and encouraging the most effective positive discipline practices for all students.

Key Findings

Buy-in: Generate buy-in with staff first and build on that relationship.

Leadership: Strong administrative support & leadership is vital to the successful implementation of PBIS.

- The administrator sets the tone in the building, indicates what is valued & the course of action that will be pursued.
- The administrator represents the interests & concerns of the district, guides in issues of law & policy, accesses resources and removes roadblocks so the PBIS team can carry out its important mission.

Planning: Proceed slowly. Do not rush implementation too quickly.

Commitment: It will take 3 to 5 years to implement all critical elements of the PBIS framework with high fidelity.

High School: Engaging high school students can be difficult. Be creative with the use of rewards & privileges for positive behavior.

Training: Initial training stages are valuable in gaining a full understanding of the research & intent behind PBIS. Training materials are also helpful with implementation, teaching the school matrix and strategizing new interventions to overcome barriers and/or challenges at the district.

Resources: Utilize other PBIS schools as a resource to troubleshoot challenges and help guide in district decisions.

Discussion

- Gaining buy-in among staff, students, and other stakeholders is critical to implementation success. Many strategies were suggested, but it is clear that carefully planning to gain buy-in is an important part of the implementation process.
- Collaboration and information sharing is important. Using other PBIS schools as resources can aide the implementation process.
- Schools have seen positive changes as a result of PBIS, but emphasized being patient in the process.

Recommendations

- Administrative leadership and support is a critical aspect to the successful implementation of PBIS. The GFW administrator should be actively involved in planning and implementation of PBIS, visible to staff, and accessible to address areas of need with staff and students.
- GFW should sign a contract sealing their commitment to themselves to carry out the entire implementation process. This would serve to avoid abandoning the framework before it is completed.
- GFW should consider hiring an outside PBIS consultant to provide follow up trainings which focuses on existing belief systems and techniques for dealing with problem behavior. With regular feedback and administrative support, staff will become more confident in their ability to readily implement proactive behavior management approaches and strategies. This could also shift more staff towards proactive discipline strategies and encourage staff to endorse and consistently implement the aspects of PBIS.

References

References are available from the author upon request.