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2014

## Implementing PBIS in a Rural Junior High School: Reducing Negative Behaviors and Gaining Future Teacher Buy-In

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Vourlos, K. T. (2014). Implementing PBIS in a rural junior high school: Reducing negative behaviors and gaining future teacher buy-in [Master's capstone project, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/896/>

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# Implementing PBIS in a Rural Junior High School: Reducing Negative Student Behaviors and Gaining Future Teacher Buy-In

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## Purpose

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) improves student outcomes including higher graduation rates, improved classroom behaviors and management, less discipline referrals, increased student engagement, improved academic performance, increased faculty retention, and an overall better school experience for staff and students. Staff buy-in can be difficult to obtain, but is critically important for school-wide success of PBIS. The purpose of this project was to investigate if a short-term exposure to PBIS-like intervention would change buy-in for junior high school teachers in Belle Plaine School District and evaluate their opinions about PBIS, along with comparing student incident reports before and throughout the intervention process.

## Methodology

### Participants

Twelve teachers voluntarily participated in the PBIS activity including five male teachers and seven female teachers. Of the twelve participants, four hold graduate level degrees in education and the remaining hold Bachelor of Science degrees.

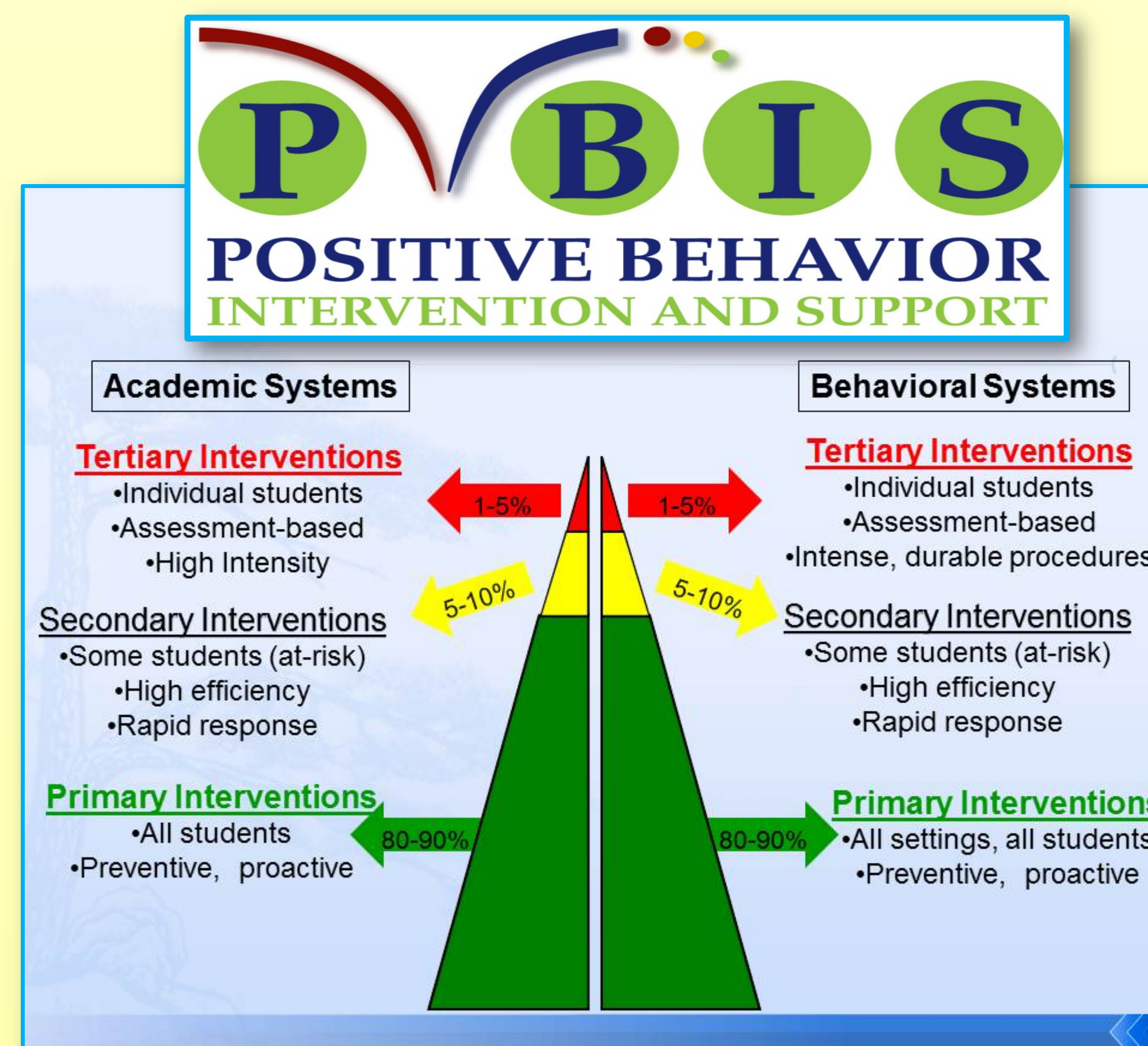
### Measurement

This study was structured as an AB time-series design including a survey to measure pre and post buy-in of 7th and 8th grade volunteer teacher participants. Additionally, a comparison of student incident reports before and during a four-week PBIS intervention process were collected. Finally, casual observations from participating teachers were collected via email to add rich, descriptive information regarding the teacher's opinion of the PBIS activity.

### Procedures

Prior to engaging in a four-week PBIS-like intervention, teacher participants completed the PBIS Buy-In Measure (Filter, 2012), which posed six questions regarding opinions of implementation of PBIS. During the intervention, participant teachers were responsible for recognizing students who displayed positive behaviors. At the end of each week, recognized students and staff partook in a drawing to receive gift cards to local businesses. Teachers' opinions of PBIS were again evaluated at the end of the four weeks, using the same tool. This data was collected and a visual analysis of the descriptive data was conducted. Data was also collected and compared for student behavioral reports incidents before and during this evaluation period.

References are available from the author upon request.



## Review of the Literature

Buy-in is a critical feature for successful PBIS implementation and sustainability of the system. School staff need to be prepared to make the commitment to change for PBIS to work in any school.

- Teacher buy-in was identified in a number of studies as a barrier to PBIS implementation (Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009; George and Kincaid, 2008; Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, & Wallace, 2007; Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, & Palmieri, 2008).

- Schools that had the best results in PBIS implementation had several elements that contributed to the success of the program. The elements include; establishing a leadership team, a district PBIS coordinator, funding for start-up and sustainability, visibility within the district and community, political support from all involved, training capacity and having outside trainers, coaching capacity to help the team, demonstration sites, and evaluation (George and Kincaid, 2008 and Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, and Wallace, 2007).

- There were three main factors that contributed to staff's skepticism about need; some staff were satisfied with their building's climate and practices and a universal intervention was viewed as unnecessary; the number of initiatives implemented in schools can be daunting to school staff; and a disconnect between behavior interventions and academic priorities (Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, & Palmieri, 2008).

## Key Findings

Data did not demonstrate a significant change on measures of buy-in from pre and post surveys and no changes in reported behavior incidents were observed. However, qualitative responses indicated a positive response from participating teachers including one participant's reflection as follows:

- "I am 100% on board with positive attention. I have seen it change student behavior from disruptive classroom to classroom friendly and my behavior from frustration, anger, and giving up to a "we can do this" approach. So, while I understand that the goal is to change student behavior I know it is equally important to change my own. When I am in that mode I enjoy my profession ten times more and, interestingly enough, so do the students. The individuals are more confident and, I'm guessing, feel more self worth, so there is an increase in positive behaviors in the classroom and sometimes those students are more responsive to class work."

## Implications for Practice

The inconclusive data from this research project demonstrates that implementing a short-term PBIS pilot in a select number of classrooms may not be an effective way to elicit buy-in from staff, even those who participate. Education is key for PBIS implementation in any school system. Staff need to understand the evidence behind PBIS, be presented a logical rationale for why it is beneficial and necessary, be connected to things the school already has in place, and using their own district data to show the need.

## Limitations and Recommendations

AB time-series design does not allow for generalization to other populations, however the descriptive nature of teacher feedback provides rich context for individual teacher's experience. Prior knowledge of or training in the PBIS system was not assessed. Additionally, participants received limited training in the system, and fidelity of implementation was not assessed. Some teachers reported recognizing academic achievements along with positive behaviors which could have confounded the results. Staff need to use data along with receiving proper education and training to set up a PBIS system to be successful, self-sustaining, and to improve overall buy-in.