

Effective Environments

This document provides an introduction and overview to the July 22, 2020 webinar focusing on how educators can enhance their Tier 1 Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to create effective environments for all settings where students access school instruction. This topic, as well as the others in the series (i.e., Social Emotional Needs, High Leverage Instruction, and Family Engagement), are intended to be aligned, leveraged and interconnected to support the needs of the whole child.

Introduction

In the coming months, it is likely how students participate in school will look different than it has in the past. This document provides recommendations educators can use to enhance their established PBIS infrastructure to equitably support all students, families, and staff in this new normal. It is more important than ever for schools to critically reflect on ways to adapt and create educational settings that are safe, predictable, positive, and culturally responsive to all, whether it is in-person or remote learning. An action educators can undertake right away is to strengthen their existing Tier 1 PBIS practices and procedures, with a focus on providing a positive, inclusive, and effective school environment.

Strengthening Tier 1 PBIS

Strengthening Tier 1 PBIS requires educators to adapt to the changing social and educational landscape, to define and teach the new behaviors students and staff will be required to use to engage in school instruction, and to systematically plan for teaching and sustaining those skills. While some students will require targeted and intensive supports, it is essential schools establish and strengthen their core foundational framework first. Strong Tier 1 systems consider diverse populations and intersecting identities in positive ways that are responsive to all students and minimize discipline issues (Coomer, Sanborn, Dagli, Martinez Hoy, Skelton, Thorius, 2018). Whether students receive school instruction through in-person or remote learning, educators must create positive, predictable, safe, and culturally responsive environments.

- In **safe environments**, educators foster inclusive spaces that consider students' mental, physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and cultural well-being (Lazzell, Huskins, Jackson, Skelton, & Thorius, 2020). Following an educational disruption, educators promote safe spaces by considering and responding to the different experiences of all impacted. Educators recognize their role in creating and maintaining students' sense of safety and use their behaviors to support student well-being (Payno-Simmons 2017, McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, Smolkowski, & Sugai, 2018).

- In **predictable environments**, educators establish clear, culturally responsive, school-wide expectations and explicitly define what those look like in action. They create a cohesive educational setting that has consistent routines, allowing all students to transition back quickly into learning and reducing the amount of new skill development required to participate in school and instruction.
- In **positive environments**, educators intentionally engage and connect with ALL students and prioritize building a school community. Educators actively screen and recognize students for working towards or meeting expectations.
- In **culturally responsive environments**, educators acknowledge and adapt to the fluid and changing lives of students, families, and staff. They prioritize communication and establish multiple ways to gain input from stakeholders. They consider and reflect on the experiences and emotions students are bringing back to school following an educational disruption and the needs of educators to fully support them.

Immediate Actions to Improve Tier 1 PBIS

The following section provides recommendations for immediate steps educators can take to improve foundational Tier 1 PBIS components following an educational disruption.

Re-engage stakeholders

Effective implementation of Tier 1 PBIS requires intentional and continuous engagement with multiple and diverse stakeholders with a range of perspectives to ensure the educational environment is culturally responsive and reflects the values and priorities of the community in which it sits. While the recommendation is to engage multiple and diverse stakeholders with diverse perspectives at least once a year, schools should proactively re-engage stakeholders following an educational disruption to assess, learn, and respond to its impact on the school community. Schools should be vigilant in their efforts to include diverse representation, especially those individuals who have been historically underrepresented in creating and shaping PBIS structures. Questions for stakeholders may include:

- How has the school disruption impacted you?
- How are current events impacting your family?
- What concerns do you or your child have about returning to school following the school disruption?
- What does your child need to feel safe for the school year?
- How can we improve the learning environment?

Identify and define new behavior expectations

Following educational disruptions, educators, in partnership with families, must now consider the behaviors, be it for in-person or remote learning, students and staff will need to learn, practice, and master to fully access and engage in school instruction. Schools should have clear, culturally nuanced expectations across settings. As schools look to revise or add to existing PBIS practices and procedures, they should consider the following:

- There are new behaviors students and staff will have to learn to participate in school and instruction, which must be clearly defined (e.g., wearing masks, social distancing, hand sanitizing/washing, appropriate contact).
- The way students behave in non-school settings may have changed during the school disruption. Schools must consider why these changes have occurred and plan for how these changes will impact student engagement and participation in school (e.g., personal safety, self-advocacy).
- There may not be agreement from everyone that the new behaviors are necessary. Clear rationales must be provided for why those behaviors have been prioritized for students and staff to learn (e.g., compelling why).

Plan for teaching expectations

Once schools have identified the new behaviors students and staff will be expected to use, plans need to be developed to systematically teach and build fluency in those skills. Failure to teach these new behaviors to fluency may result in students being excluded from the educational environment. Schools should consider taking the following steps:

- Review and revise existing current lesson plans. Consider how these may be adapted to set students and educators up for success in new learning environments.
- Create lesson plans for teaching all new behaviors students will be expected to learn.
- Develop a schedule for teaching expectations that includes a process for providing feedback and structures for re-teaching.
- Update acknowledgement systems to account for changes in where and how students receive school instruction.

Resources (National Technical Assistance Center on PBIS)

[Returning to School During and After Crisis](https://www.pbis.org/announcements/returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis)

(<https://www.pbis.org/announcements/returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis>)

Resources (Great Lakes Equity Center)

[Creating Caring Classroom Communities](https://greatlakesequity.org/node/1429)

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References

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- McIntosh, K., Girvan, E., Horner, R. H., Smolkowski, K., & Sugai, G. (2018). A 5-point intervention approach for enhancing equity in school discipline.
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