

***IS SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT  
AN EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE?***

Robert H. Horner, George Sugai and Timothy Lewis  
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A major focus for current policy and systems change efforts in education and mental health is the extent to which states are investing in practices and procedures that are supported by rigorous research evidence. Evidence-based practices have been demonstrated in formal research studies to be related to valued outcomes for children and their families.

A reasonable question is if School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based practice. The purpose of this document is to lay out the current evidence assessing SWPBIS and the considerations that may be relevant for state, district and national decision-makers.

Any claim that a practice or procedure is “evidence-based” should be framed in the context of (a) explicit description of the procedure/practice, (b) clear definition of the settings and implementers who use the procedure/practice, (c) identification of the population of individuals who are expected to benefit, and (d) the specific outcomes expected. Given this context, the research involving the practice/procedure may be reviewed, and an array of criteria have been proposed by different agencies and organizations (c.f. American Psychological Association, What Works Clearinghouse, SAMSA, Institute for Education Science) for how this literature may be examined to determine the level of experimental rigor, and the confidence with which any statement about “evidence-based” effects can be claimed. A summary of suggestions for defining evidence-based practices from Quantitative (Gersten et al., 2005), Correlational (Thompson et al., 2005) and Single Subject (Horner et al., 2005) research methods was reviewed for educational literature in special section of *Exceptional Children* (Odom et al., 2005).

We provide here (a) the citations defining the context content for SWPBS, (b) the current status of evidence for each of the three tiers of the SWPBS approach (Primary Prevention, Secondary Prevention, Tertiary Prevention), and (c) summary of current and expected directions.

School-wide Positive Behavior Support

School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success. PBIS is not a packaged curriculum, but an approach that defines core elements that can be achieved through a variety of strategies. The core elements at each of the three tiers in the prevention model are defined below:

Prevention Tier	Core Elements
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behavioral Expectations Defined</li> <li>Behavioral Expectations Taught</li> <li>Reward system for appropriate behavior</li> <li>Clearly defined consequences for problem behavior</li> <li>Differentiated instruction for behavior</li> <li>Continuous collection and use of data for decision-making</li> <li>Universal screening for behavior support</li> </ul>
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress monitoring for at risk students</li> <li>System for increasing structure and predictability</li> <li>System for increasing contingent adult feedback</li> <li>System for linking academic and behavioral performance</li> <li>System for increasing home/school communication</li> <li>Collection and use of data for decision-making</li> <li>Basic-level function-based support</li> </ul>
Tertiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functional Behavioral Assessment (full, complex)</li> <li>Team-based comprehensive assessment</li> <li>Linking of academic and behavior supports</li> <li>Individualized intervention based on assessment information focusing on (a) prevention of problem contexts, (b) instruction on functionally equivalent skills, and instruction on desired performance skills, (c) strategies for placing problem behavior on extinction, (d) strategies for enhancing contingency reward of desired behavior, and (e) use of negative or safety consequences if needed.</li> <li>Collection and use of data for decision-making</li> </ul>

The core elements of PBIS are integrated within organizational systems in which teams, working with administrators and behavior specialists, provide the training, policy support and organizational supports needed for (a) initial implementation, (b) active application, and (c) sustained use of the core elements (Sugai & Horner, 2010).

Is there evidence indicating that SWPBS can be implemented with fidelity and is related to improved social and/or academic outcomes for students?

Among the most rigorous standards for documenting that a practice/procedure is “evidence-based” is demonstration of at least two peer-reviewed randomized controlled trial research studies that document experimental control. To meet this standard the practice/procedure must be operationally defined, there must be formal measures of fidelity, there must be formal outcome measures, and these elements must be used within a randomized control trial group research design. The citations below summarize first the technical adequacy of relevant research measures, then randomized controlled trials, and evaluation studies examining the effects of PBIS.

## Measures

### SWPBS measures documenting fidelity

Bradshaw, C., Debnam, K., Koth, C., & Leaf, P. (2009). Preliminary validation of the implementation phases inventory for assessing fidelity of school-wide positive behavior supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 11* (3), 145-160.

Burk, M., Davis, J., Lee, Y., Hagan-Burke, S., Kwok, O. & Sugai, G. (2012). Universal screening for behavioral risk in elementary schools using SWPBIS expectations. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 20*(1), 38-54.

Childs, K., Kincaid, D., & George, H. (2010). A model for statewide evaluation of a universal positive behavior support initiative. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12* (4), 195-197.

Cohen, R., Kincaid, D., & Childs, K. (2007). Measuring school-wide positive behavior support implementation: Development and validation of the “Benchmarks of Quality.” *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 9*(4), 203-213.

Horner, R. H., Todd, A., Lewis-Palmer, T., Irvin, L., Sugai, G., & Boland, J. (2004). The school-wide evaluation tool (SET): A research instrument for assessing school-wide positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention, 6*(1), 3-12.

Irvin, L.K., Horner, R.H., Ingram, K., Todd, A.W., Sugai, G., Sampson, N., & Boland, J. (2006). Using office discipline referral data for decision-making about student

- behavior in elementary and middle schools: An empirical investigation of validity. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 8(1), 10-23.
- Irvin, L.K., Tobin, T., Sprague, J., Sugai, G. and Vincent, C. (2004). Validity of office discipline referral measures as indices of school-wide behavioral status and effects of school-wide behavioral interventions. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 6, 131-147.
- McIntosh, K, Campbell, A., Carter, D., & Zumbo, B., (2009) Concurrent validity of office discipline referrals and cut points used in school-wide positive behavior support. *Behavioral Disorders*.
- McIntosh, K., Fisher, E., Kennedy, K., Craft, C., & Morrison, G., (2012). Using office discipline referrals and school exclusion data to assess school discipline. In S Jimerson, A. Nickerson, M. Mayer & M Furlong (Eds.) *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety*. New York, Routledge. 305-315.
- Spaulding, S., Irvin, L., Horner, R., May, S., Emeldi, M., Tobin, T., & Sugai, G. (2010). School-wide Social-Behavioral Climate, Student Problem Behavior, and Related Administrative Decisions: Empirical Patterns from 1,510 Schools Nationwide. *Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention*, 12, 69-85
- Stover, A.C., Dunlap, G., & Neff, B. (2008). The effects of a contingency contracting program on the nocturnal enuresis of three children. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 18, 421-428.
- Safran, S. P. (2006). Using the Effective Behavior Supports Survey to guide development of school-wide positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 8, 3-9.
- Tobin, T., Vincent, C., Horner, R., Rossetto Dickey, C. & May, S., (2012). Fidelity measures to improve implementation of positive behavioural support. *International Journal of Positive Behavioural Support*. 2-2, 12-19.
- Vincent, C., Spaulding, S., & Tobin, T.J. (2010). A reexamination of the psychometric properties of the *School-wide Evaluation Tool* (SET). *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 12, 161-179.

## **Primary Prevention Tier of School-wide Positive Behavior Support**

### **Randomized Controlled Trials assessing PBIS**

- a. Horner, R., Sugai, G., Smolkowski, K., Todd, A., Nakasato, J., & Esperanza, J. (2009). A Randomized Control Trial of School-wide Positive Behavior Support in Elementary Schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 11 (3), 113-144.

This paper documents that typical state agents were successful in implementing SWPBS practices, and that these practices were experimentally linked to improved perception of school safety, with preliminary support that implementation was associated with improved proportion of students at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade who met the state reading standard.

- b. Bradshaw, C., Waasdorp, T., & Leaf P. (2012) Examining the variation in the impact of School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. *Pediatrics*, 10 (5), 1136-1145.
- c. Bradshaw, C., Koth, C., Thornton, L., & Leaf, P. (2009). Altering school climate through School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: Findings from a Group-Randomized Effectiveness Trial. *Prevention Science*, 10, 100-115.

A randomized control trial documenting change in the organizational effectiveness of schools as a function of implementing SWPBS.

- d. Bradshaw, C., Koth, C., Bevans, K., Ialongo, N., & Leaf, P. (2008). The impact of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) on the organizational health of elementary schools. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23 (4), 462-473.

Bradshaw et al., document that implementation of school-wide PBIS by typical implementation personnel was successful in achieving high fidelity of adoption, and improved “organizational health” within the schools.

- e. Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Examining the effects of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on student outcomes: Results from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 12, 133-148

This randomized control trial documents experimentally that implementation of SWPBIS was related to (a) high fidelity of implementation, (b) reduction in office discipline referrals, (c) reduction in suspensions, and (c) improved fifth grade academic performance

- f. Bradshaw, C., Reinke, W., Brown, L., Bevans, K., & Leaf, P. (2008). Implementation of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) in elementary schools: Observations from a randomized trial. *Education and Treatment of Children, 31*, 1-26.

The authors document a randomized control trial of SWPBIS with observations from school implementers.

- g. Bradshaw, C.P., & Pas, E.T. (2011). A state-wide scale-up of School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): Developing systems to support and assess adoption, implementation, and outcomes. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- h. Benner, G., Nelson, J.R., Sanders, E., & Ralston, N. (2012). Behavior intervention for students with externalizing behavior problems: Primary-level standard protocol. *Exceptional Children, 78*(2), 181-198.
- i. Ross, S., Romer, N., & Horner, R.H., (2012). Teacher well-being and the implementation of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions 14*(2) 118-128.
- j. Richter, M., Lewis, T., & Hagar, J. (2012). The relationship between principal leadership skills and school-wide positive behavior support: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions 14* (2) 69-77.
- k. Sprague, J., & Biglan, A., et al. (in progress). A Randomized Control Trial of SWPBS with Middle Schools.

This research is currently in data-collection phase, with preliminary results presented at professional conferences indicating reduction in problem behavior levels when SWPBS core features were implemented. Publishable results are anticipated for 2010.

- l. Sprague, J. R., Walker, H., Golly, A., White, K., Myers, D. R., & Shannon, T. (2002). Translating research into effective practice: The effects of a universal staff and student intervention on key indicators of school safety and discipline. *Education and Treatment of Children, 24*(4), 495-511.

Quasi-experimental design documenting improved perception of safety linked to implementation school-wide positive behavior support.

- m. Waasdorp, T., Bradshaw, C., & Leaf, P., (2012) The Impact of School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Bullying and Peer Rejection: A Randomized Controlled Effectiveness Trial. *Archive of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*. 166(2):149-156
- n. Bradshaw, C. P., Pas, E. T., Goldweber, A., Rosenberg, M., & Leaf, P. (2012). Integrating schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports with tier 2 coaching to student support teams: The PBISplus Model. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 5(3), 177-193. doi:10.1080/1754730x.2012.707429

### **Syntheses of School-wide PBS from Mental Health Institute**

Kutash, K., Duchnowski, A., & Lynn, N. (2006). *School-based Mental Health: An Empirical Guild for Decision-makers*. The Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.

“Most experts in the field agree that school-wide PBS is in its infancy (Dunlap, 2006). However, the early results of PBS interventions implemented at the indicated level, and the growing body of support for implementation at the universal and selective levels for children who have emotional/behavioral problem is very promising.” P. 32

“Because the roots of PBS are in applied experimental analysis of behavior, the evidence for PBS, at this time, is primarily derived from single subject designs. This research, while not in the traditional empirical mode, is nevertheless rigorous, generalizable, and strong in social validity (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Therefore, administrators have a preponderance of evidence to support their exploration of PBS as a viable model for School-based Mental Health programs.” P. 33

**Evaluation and Quasi-Experimental studies** examining SWPBS that used research quality measures, but did NOT employ experimental designs document both implementation of the core feature by typical school personnel, and either improved academic performance, or reductions in office discipline referrals.

Barrett, S., Bradshaw, C., & Lewis-Palmer, T. (2008). Maryland state-wide PBIS initiative. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 10, 105-114.

Benedict, E., Horner, R.H., & Squires, J. (2007). Assessment and implementation of Positive Behavior Support in preschools. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 27(3), 174-192.

- Biglan, A. (1995). Translating what we know about the context of antisocial behavior in to a lower prevalence of such behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 28, 479-492.
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- Bohanon, H., Fenning, P., Carney, K., Minnis, M., Anderson-Harriss, S., Moroz, K., Hicks, K., Kasper, B., Culos, C., Sailor, W., & Piggott, T. (2006). School-wide application of positive behavior support in an urban high school: A case study. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 8(3), 131-145.
- Boneshefski, M., & Runge, T., (2014). Addressing disproportionate discipline practices within a school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports framework: A practical guide for calculating and using disproportionality rates. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* 16 (3) 149-158.
- Burke, M., Davis, J., Hagan-Burke, S., Lee Y, Fogarty, M. (2014). Using SWPBS expectations as a screening tool to predict behavioral risk in middle school. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* 16(1) 5-17.
- Chaparro, E., Smolkowski, K., Baker, S., Hanson, N., & Ryan-Jackson, K. (2012) A model for system-wide collaboration to support integrated social behavioral and literacy evidence-based practices. *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(5), 465-482.
- Chaparro, E., Ryan Jackson, K., Baker, S. & Smolkowski, K., (2012) Effective behavioural and instructional support systems: An integrated approach to behaviour and academic support at the district level, *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 5:3, 161-176
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- Coffey, J., & Horner, R., (2012). The sustainability of schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports. *Exceptional Children*, 78 (4) 407-422.



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- De Pry, R. L., & Sugai, G. (2002). The effect of active supervision and precorrection on minor behavioral incidents in a sixth grade general education classroom. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 11, 255-267.
- Doolittle, J., & Horner R., (2007). Sustaining school-wide positive behavior support. Manuscript in preparation.
- Duda, M.A., Dunlap, G., Fox, L., Lentini, R., & Clarke, S. (2004). An experimental evaluation of positive behavior support in a community preschool program. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 24(3), 143-155.
- Farkas, M., Simonson, B., Migdole, S., Donovan, M., Clemens, K., Cicchese, V. (2012) Schoolwide positive behavior support in an alternative school setting: An evaluation of fidelity, outcomes and social validity of Tier I implementation. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 20 (4), 275-288.
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- Horner, R.H., Sugai, G., Todd, A.W., & Lewis-Palmer, T. (2005). School-wide positive behavior support. In L. Bambara & L. Kern (Eds.) *Individualized supports for students with problem behaviors: Designing positive behavior plans*. (pp. 359-390) New York: Guilford Press.

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### **Bully Prevention within PBIS**

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Ross, S., & Horner, R. (2009). Bully prevention in positive behavior support. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 42, 747-759. Doi: 10.1901/jaba.2009.42-747

Ross, S., & Horner, R., (2014). Bully prevention in positive behavior support: Preliminary evaluation of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade attitudes toward bullying. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 22(4) 225-236.

Waasdorp, T., Bradshaw, C., & Leaf, P., (2012) The Impact of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Bullying and Peer Rejection: A Randomized Controlled Effectiveness Trial. *Archive of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*. 2012;166(2):149-156

### **Secondary Tier of School-wide Positive Behavior Support.**

#### Randomized Controlled Trials

Cheney, D., Stage, S. Hawken, L., Lynass, L., Mielenz, C., Waugh, M. (2009). A 2-year outcome study of the check, connect, and expect intervention for students at risk

for severe behavior problems. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*.  
17, 226-243.

Randomized trial of Check-in/ Check-out procedures. Results indicate functional effect between use of procedures and both improved scores on standardized assessment instruments, and direct observation of problem behavior.

Walker, H., Seeley, J., Small, J., Severson, H., Graham, B., Feil, E., Serna, L., Golly A., Forness, S. (2009). A randomized controlled trial of the first step to success early intervention: Demonstration of program efficacy outcomes in a diverse, urban school district. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*. 17, 197-212.

#### Materials and Research on Specific Secondary Interventions.

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