SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CLASSROOM WITHIN A PBIS FRAMEWORK

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Introduction

Students with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusionary and reactive discipline practices than students without disabilities. For example, according to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), students with disabilities comprise 12% of the school enrollment; however, they experience 26% of out of school suspensions, 24% of expulsions, 28% of referrals to law enforcement or arrests, 71% of restraints, and 66% of seclusions (Office of Civil Rights [OCR], 2018). Students with disabilities are overrepresented in other school disciplinary consequences (e.g., office discipline referrals, in school suspensions) as well (Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Vincent et al., 2011).

Fortunately, decades of research demonstrate that when educators implement positive, proactive, and evidence-based practices within a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, students experience (a) improved academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes and (b) reduced exclusionary and reactive discipline (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Horner et al., 2009; Lassen et al., 2006). Within a PBIS framework, educators implement universal practices (Tier 1) to support all students, targeted practices (Tier 2) for students who require an enhanced level of support to experience success, and intensive and individualized practices (Tier 3) for students with more significant or chronic levels of need.

Practitioners may question where students with disabilities "fit" within multi-tiered frameworks, like PBIS (Chan et al., 2018; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). By legal definition, students with disabilities require specially-designed instruction documented in an individualized education program. Therefore, we hear common misrules or "myths" in the field, including (a) special education is Tier 3 or (b) students in special education require only Tier 3 supports to be successful (IDEA, 2004). In reality, students with disabilities may receive and benefit from supports within each tier, including Tier 1 (Cheney et al., 2004; Grasley-Boy et al., 2019; Tobin et al., 2012).

Core Features

There are four core features of implementing PBIS to support all students, including students with disabilities, in classroom settings: (1) invest in prevention, (2) integrate classroom practices, (3) tier 1 is for all, and (4) all means all.

Invest in Prevention

Within each classroom, effective educators support and respond to student behavior[1] by (a) implementing Tier 1 foundation, prevention, and response practices and (b) using data to guide their implementation and differentiation of practices (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2015).

In particular, educators:

- emphasize positive and proactive practices,

- respond to challenging behavior with an instructional focus (i.e., teach and strengthen social, emotional, and behavioral skills to replace the challenging behavior), and

- minimize their use of exclusionary and reactive discipline (#DitchTheClip[2]).

Integrate Classroom Practices

Further, within each classroom, educators integrate effective academic and behavior support[3] to increase the likelihood that all students, including students with disabilities, benefit from classroom supports.

Tier 1 is for All

Effective educators design, implement, and differentiate Tier 1[4] practices to meet the needs of the majority (>80%) of their learners. Thus, when learners have more intensive needs, educators intensify their Tier 1 practices—they may provide more explicit social skills instruction, frequent prompts or reminders, engaging instruction, opportunities for reinforcement, and specific instructional feedback for academic and social behavior at an intensity that meets the needs of at least 80% of students in their classroom or school. For students who continue to require additional support to be successful, educators may layer on additional Tier 2[5] or Tier 3[6] supports; however, all students continue to receive Tier 1 support.
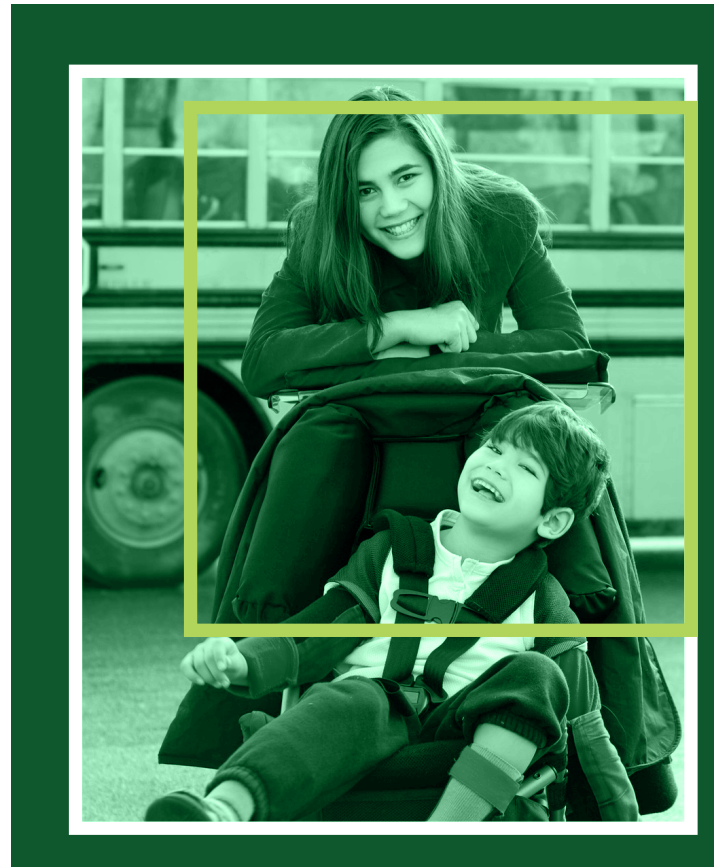
All Means All

To increase likelihood of equitable outcomes with Tier 1 practices, effective educators engage students and families in selecting, implementing, and adjusting practices to consider cultural and contextual factors that may affect teachers' implementation, students' experiences and outcomes, and other key factors that contribute to the discipline gap. Educators also intentionally implement key practices to increase equity[7] within classrooms.

Intervention Strategies

Guided by the above core features, effective educators implement the following "top ten" intervention strategies to support and respond to student behavior[8] in their classroom.

1 **Design and Adapt The *Physical Environment* of the Classroom to Meet the Needs of All Students.**

To support all students, consider (a) mobility around and access to all areas of the classroom, (b) visual supports for students, and (c) assistive technology and other supports to promote learning within the classroom environment (Archer & Huges, 2011; Wong & Wong, 2009).

2 **Develop and Explicitly Teach *Predictable Classroom Routines* to Maximize Students' Ability to Independently Navigate the Classroom**

To increase the likelihood that all students benefit from predictable classroom routines,[9] explicitly define and teach the routine, review and re-teach on a regular schedule, and provide and gradually fade prompts until students are able to independently navigate classroom routines (Kern & Clemens, 2007).

3 **Post, Define, and Teach 3-5 *Positive Classroom Expectations***

Engage students in defining and positing a small number of positively stated expectations, and ensure posted expectations are accessible to learners from a variety of language and ability backgrounds. To maximize efficiency, explicitly teach expectations in the context of classroom routines, leveraging the planned schedule for reviewing, re-teaching, and fading prompts to also teach expectations (Alter & Haydon, 2017).

4 **Promote *Active Engagement* with High Rates of Opportunities to Respond.**

All students, across all grades and content areas, benefit from engaging instruction that includes high quality, high rate, and varied opportunities to respond (Alter et al., 2011; Partin et al., 2010; Sutherland et al., 2003). To increase engagement opportunities for all students, consider incorporating instructional and assistive technology (Hirsch et al., 2019) and other empirically-supported strategies to increase opportunities to respond.[10]

5 **Provide *Prompts*, Pre-Corrections, and Other Reminders to Set Students Up for Success**

Simple strategies, like providing "positive greetings at the door"[11] (i.e., connect with each student as they enter the classroom, prompt routines and expected behavior, and provide specific praise for transition), result in positive outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities (Allday & Pakurar, 2007; Allday et al., 2011; Cook et al., 2018).

6 Engage in *Active Supervision* to Monitor Student Behavior

By engaging in active supervision[12]—that is, moving around the classroom, scanning frequently, and interacting with students—educators promote contextually appropriate behavior and prevent or reduce contextually inappropriate behavior (Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997; DePry & Sugai, 2002).

7 Deliver Behavior *Specific Praise* and Other Strategies to Acknowledge Behavior That is Appropriate for the Context

Specific praise "tags" a contextually appropriate behavior with a positive statement ("Thank you for participating respectfully.") and results in an increase in desired behavior for most students (Floress, Beschta, Meyer, & Reinke, 2017). Supplement specific praise with additional strategies to acknowledge student behavior (OSEP, 2015).

8 Provide Behavior *Specific Error Corrections* and Other Strategies to Respond Instructionally to Behavior That is Inappropriate for the Context

Specific error corrections[13] signal an error, share how to correct the behavior in the future, and provide an opportunity to practice and receive praise for the contextually appropriate behavior. When needed, supplement this approach with additional strategies to respond to contextually inappropriate behavior.

9 Ensure Each Student Experiences a Favorable *Ratio of Positive to Negative Interactions* (e.g., Praise to Corrections)

As highlighted in national news,[14] all students benefit when they experience more positive than negative feedback, and this is especially true for students with disabilities who may require even more favorable ratios (as high as 9:1) to experience benefit (Caldarella et al., 2019; Downs et al., 2019).

10 Collect And Use Fidelity and Outcome *Data to Guide* Implementation and Differentiation of Practices

Educators use data to evaluate their own implementation fidelity and students' outcomes (indicating responsiveness to classroom practices). Based on data, educators may (a) adjust or differentiate Tier 1 supports or (b) layer on additional Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports to meet the needs of all.

The Bottom Line

All students, including students with disabilities, benefit from effective implementation of empirically-supported practices within a PBIS framework.

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Embedded Hyperlinks

1.   https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers

2.   https://www.pbis.org/resource/ditch-the-clip-why-clip-charts-are-not-a-pbis-practice-and-what-to-do-instead

3.   https://www.pbis.org/resource/classroom-integrated-academics-and-behavior-brief

4.   https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-1

5.   https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-2

6.   https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-3

7.   https://www.pbis.org/topics/equity

8.   https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers

9.   http://pbismissouri.org/classroom-procedures-and-routines-content-acquisition-video/

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