

# INCREASING DISTRICT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT PBIS

October 2020

Across the country, over 27,000 schools currently report implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; McIntosh, 2019). They account for 30% of the nation's total schools and represent a reach of more than 15 million students. In recent years, the number of schools implementing has steadily grown and even doubled over the past decade (McIntosh, 2019). As schools increasingly choose to implement PBIS to positively impact school climate and student social-emotional-behavioral health, it presents a unique opportunity for districts to plan for expansion and sustainability (George & Kincaid, 2008).

## RATIONALE

While implementation efforts may begin with single schools serving as model or pilot demonstrations, key to sustainability and expansion is creating a district-wide initiative that builds internal capacity for training, coaching, evaluation, and embedding behavioral expertise across the continuum of supports (Horner et al., 2014). Internal capacity in these areas has proven to be crucial for enhancing the efficiency for sustaining PBIS, as well as transitioning implementation from the universal level of support (Tier 1) to more targeted and intensive levels (Tiers 2 and 3; Horner et al., 2014).

Ultimately, implementation at the Tier 1 (universal) level alone will prove insufficient in meeting the needs of all students. It is important for districts to recognize the value of implementing PBIS across all tiers and dedicate the necessary resources, time, and energy for supporting schools in implementation at Tiers 2 and 3 (George & Kincaid, 2008). Each school will have a population of students who need more targeted or individualized supports to achieve success. Rather than schools owning the responsibility for adopting options for targeted interventions and navigating the implementation process alone, districts can establish guidelines for the selection of evidence-based interventions for Tier 2 and provide technical assistance and coaching to support effective implementation. Additionally, the individualized and intensive nature of Tier 3 typically requires district-wide resources to effectively support students. As such, implementation at this tier is more efficient when schools can access and take advantage of district resources.

Expansion from model demonstrations to district-wide implementation provides districts the advantage of designing a coordinated approach for intervening early, often, and strategically. Coordination among district-level departments builds awareness of PBIS, fosters alignment across district-wide initiatives, and helps clarify what is currently being done and what is planned. By working to align existing initiatives, programs, and practices with PBIS, districts can maximize their resources and workforce capacity to create an early intervention framework that supports students across all schools.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this brief is to provide guidance in developing a district-wide PBIS initiative outlining key features and steps.

## LOGIC OF DISTRICT-WIDE IMPLEMENTATION

Building internal capacity as a means to ensure sustainability improves the efficiency and effectiveness of resources utilized. A District Leadership Team should be established to guide the assessment and action planning process as it relates to the implementation of PBIS data, practices, and systems throughout the district (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). According to the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2020a), "The District Leadership Team is a collection of personnel who serve two main functions, a) executive functions (e.g., creating policy, aligning resources) and b) implementation functions (e.g., supporting individual school teams)" (p.16).

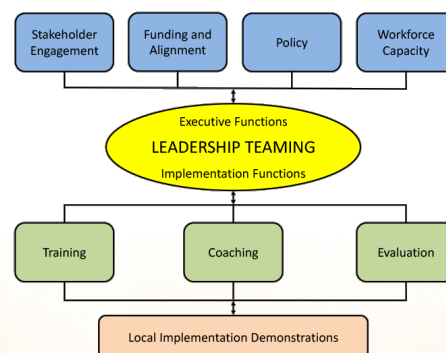


Figure 1. Key functions and foci of the district leadership team

### **Creating a District Leadership Team**

As districts consider implementation of PBIS across all buildings one initial step is forming a leadership team. It is important that the District Leadership Team (DLT), collectively, have the knowledge and ability to influence implementation across buildings and tiers. When establishing a DLT and identifying potential members, decision-making authority, stakeholder representation, and PBIS expertise are significant aspects to consider.

#### *Decision-making Authority*

It is critical that at least one member of the DLT have a documented position of influence within the district and the authority to make key decisions (e.g., implementation, policy, data systems, budget). The purpose of the DLT is to develop the organizational structures necessary for PBIS implementation district-wide and to evaluate and guide the district initiative. As a matter of strategy and necessity, the DLT should include members with the ability to implement needed action steps and make executive decisions regarding district discipline policies, procedures and processes (e.g., Director of Human Resources, Director of Student Services, Director of Data/Assessment, Director of Special Education; Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2020a). Often times, organizational charts can identify individuals with the ability to make district-level decisions who are best suited for the DLT. Because decisions regarding implementation are made on an ongoing basis and communication to stakeholders is vital, individuals with decision-making authority should be able to attend DLT meetings regularly (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2020b).

#### *Stakeholder Representation*

The DLT should be reflective of the demographics and operations of the district. Stakeholder representation (both internal and external) is an essential element because decisions made by the DLT impact the district and the larger community it serves. The composition of the DLT should include individuals from within the district who a) are able to influence professional development (e.g., training, coaching) across the district, b) are knowledgeable about district operations across grade levels and programs, c) have access to district-level executive leadership, d) coordinate community and family engagement, e) have special education administrative authority, and f)

have detailed knowledge about the current social-emotional-behavioral initiatives within the district (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2020b).

Equally important to the representation of internal stakeholders is the inclusion and involvement of representatives of the local community. The District Systems Fidelity Inventory (DSFI) highlights that the DLT should actively involve stakeholders, families, and community members representative of the district's demographics and any underserved populations (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2020b).

#### *PBIS Expertise*

In order to develop, implement, and sustain a PBIS framework, several members of the DLT must have social-emotional-behavioral expertise across the full continuum of support (Tiers 1, 2, and 3) and represent all grade levels (preK-12). As implementation expands across the district, it is important to monitor fidelity so that the right supports can be provided at the right times. For that reason, it is important that some members of the DLT be fluent in the PBIS framework of data, practices, and systems and also in the areas of training, coaching, and evaluation (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2020a).

### **Review Data to Guide and Drive Professional Development and Allocate Resources**

Once the DLT is established, the District Systems Fidelity Inventory (DSFI) should be completed as a means to assess the current status of the essential drivers for implementation (see Figure 1) as well as current levels of implementation fidelity and student outcomes (e.g., discipline referrals, attendance, school climate). Information gained from this assessment can help teams develop short- and long-term goals, action plans, and next steps. Identifying current strengths to sustain and leverage while determining areas for growth and improvement should be documented within an action plan. As the year progresses and more fidelity and outcome data are collected, the DLT is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the data. The information gained should be used to impact the allocation of resources, determine training, coaching and technical assistance, and identify policies and practices for review and/or revision.

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## CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of PBIS at the building-level is more successful when it is supported by a district-level infrastructure or system. In order to increase the capacity for effective implementation across buildings, districts should pay attention to the necessary elements for implementation (see Figure 1) which can facilitate and sustain change (George & Kincaid, 2008; Horner et al., 2014).

The District Systems Fidelity Inventory (DSFI) can provide an overview of key and essential features when exploring district-wide implementation of PBIS and considering an adoption plan. Some initial steps for districts' beginning the process include:

1. **Assessing overall “readiness” prior to moving forward with implementation.** The *PBIS District Leadership Team Practice Guide* serves as a companion to the DSFI and includes guidance for all categories and items on the instrument, as well as district examples, templates, tools, and resources. One tool is the “District Readiness Checklist” which district leaders can use as they consider district-wide adoption of PBIS and plan for installation.
2. **Connecting with a state or regional PBIS network to support the administration of the DSFI and action planning.** The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports lists the contact information for all PBIS State Coordinators. If there is not an active initiative in your state you can reach out to the listed PBIS Center partner for your state ([www.pbis.org/about/pbis-state-coordinators](http://www.pbis.org/about/pbis-state-coordinators)).
3. **Reviewing the DSFI and its included administration and action planning guidance to foster success.** The administration guidance offers a clear rationale and purpose, recommendations on team membership, administration, and data to support decision making, and common terms and definitions. Additionally, a PBIS District Coordinator (i.e., local coordinator) should be familiar with the structure of the instrument and its categories, critical features, data sources, and scoring criteria.
4. **Administering the DSFI and establishing a process for obtaining team consensus**

### on each item and collecting the results.

Analyzing the resulting data from the DSFI and using the information in the *PBIS District Leadership Team Practice Guide* to inform and guide action planning will aid districts in their implementation of a PBIS framework

## RESOURCES

- District Systems Fidelity Inventory
- PBIS District Leadership Team Practice Guide: A Companion Guide to the District Systems Fidelity Inventory

## REFERENCES

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