

A MULTI-TIERED APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: AN EXPANDED GUIDE TO PROACTIVE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES



Research indicates that disciplinary exclusions are ineffective at reducing problem behaviors (Sundius & Farneth, 2008). Therefore, it is suggested that schools shift their approach from focusing on punitive measures toward strategies that support students' strengths while addressing needs through collaboration and support.

Educators can provide stronger support for students by taking into account the school's culture and employing multiple approaches. To address challenging behavior more effectively, strategies should prioritize meeting students' behavioral needs instead of relying solely on punishments (Gage, et al 2022; Peterson, 2006).

By adopting a multi-tiered systems approach, educational organizations can choose options that align with their school's culture and implement multiple strategies that can improve support for students.

This document is an extension of the January 2024 PaTTAN publication: *A Multi-Tiered Approach to School Discipline: Proactive Strategies to Reduce Exclusionary Practice*.

This resource guide is intended to support school teams in planning and developing a robust, multi-tiered system of support. Recognizing that each school is unique, PaTTAN does not endorse specific strategies or programs, and encourages schools to collaborate with their local intermediate unit and/or PaTTAN regional office for additional information and support.

Strategies are provided to ALL students with the aim to create a positive school environment that fosters a sense of belonging and values individual students.

Create a Supportive Learning Environment:

- Design classrooms that prioritize the well-being and engagement of all students. This involves designing physically and psychologically safe and secure spaces, communicating clear and consistent expectations, and promoting a climate of belonging.
- Strategies may include: arranging seating for optimal interaction; establishing and teaching age-appropriate expectations; and, positively stating and explicitly teaching routines and procedures consistently.

Create Opportunities for Building Positive Relationships:

Intentionally design learning opportunities that foster connection through:

- mentorship programs
- peer support groups
- cooperative learning projects
- mutual respect, acknowledgement, and recognition

Deliver Positive Classroom Behavioral Supports and De-escalation Training to All Staff:

- Implement effective evidence-based practices and de-escalation techniques to prevent and manage potential disruptive behavior. Training may include developing:
 - a positive classroom behavior system
 - methods for remaining calm
 - effective active listening skills
 - an understanding of nonverbal cues
- Provide professional learning opportunities and resources, which can be accessed at the [PaTTAN website](#).

Establish Explicit Schoolwide Expectations:

Clearly defined expectations create a shared understanding of behavior standards throughout the school. This involves developing a consistently and explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced framework.

Implement a Positive Schoolwide Behavior Support System:

PBIS promotes social-emotional competence, academic success, and a positive school climate. It also improves adult well-being. It is a way to create positive, predictable, equitable and safe learning environments where everyone thrives. When students demonstrate mastery and follow established rules and routines, teachers should provide age-appropriate specific performance feedback in meaningful and caring ways.

Incorporate Restorative Practices:

- Restorative practices focus on building relationships, fostering a community, and restoring relationships rather than punitive measures.
- Implementing affective language, proactive circles, conferences, or restorative conversations can effectively address conflicts.

Increase Opportunities for Positive Reinforcement:

- Recognize and reinforce behavior to foster an inclusive culture and climate of belonging.
- Implement systems for acknowledging achievements, such as a token economy, specific verbal praise, and/or recognition ceremonies.

Use Data to Proactively Identify Early Warning Signs:

- Implement an “Early Warning System” to monitor attendance, academic progress, and student behavior.
- The analysis of data in Early Warning Systems aids in identifying potential issues and allows for proactive intervention.
- Timely intervention, such as counseling or additional academic support, can prevent the escalation of problems.

Promote the Development of Coping Skills:

- Integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum, which helps students develop essential life skills.
- Provide lessons on self-awareness, empathy, and coping mechanisms.
- Implement a school mental health framework: [Center on PBIS: School Mental Health Quality Framework and Tools Alignment Guide](#)

Provide Effective Instruction on Protective and Risk Factors:

- For students, integrate wellness education into the curriculum, teaching evidence-based strategies for mental health and well-being. Include stress reduction techniques, mindfulness practices, and healthy lifestyle choices.
- Provide learning opportunities to identify and address factors that may influence or impact student behavior.

Provide Training on Evidence-Based Practices and Strategies:

- Train all staff in positive behavior support strategies tailored for the classroom and school setting. This includes understanding vulnerable decision points and implementing neutralizing routines.
- Provide training on trauma-informed care; the recognition of signs of stress; and, the implementation of appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral supports.

Additional Resources can be accessed at:

[CAST: Universal Design for Learning](#)

[Center on PBIS: A 5-Point Intervention Approach to Enhancing Equity in School Discipline](#)

[Center on PBIS: School Climate Survey Suite](#)

[Center on PBIS: School-wide PBIS](#)

[Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)

[Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\): SEL 3 Signature Practices Comprehensive, Integrated, Three-Tiered Model of Prevention \(Ci3T\)](#)

[Eliminate Stigma: Compassion Resilience Toolkit](#)

[Everyone Graduates Center-Early Warning and Response Systems](#)

[International Institute for Restorative Practices \(IIRP\)](#)

[IRIS: Addressing Challenging Behaviors \(Elementary\)](#)

[IRIS: Addressing Challenging Behaviors \(Secondary\)](#)

[NCSSLE: Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#)

[NCSSLE: School Climate Improvement](#)

[Northeast PBIS](#)

[PA Career Standards](#)

[PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency: School Safety and Security Assessment Criteria Toolkit](#)

[PA Department of Education: Office of School Climate and Well-Being](#)

[PA Department of Education - “Significant Disproportionality”](#)

[PA Evidence Resource Center](#)

[PaTTAN: Teachers’ Desk Reference: Classroom Management](#)

[PBISApps – “Disrupt Your Vulnerable Decisions with These Simple Solutions”](#)

[PBISApps – “Equitable Outcomes Require Finding Vulnerable Decisions”](#)

[Pbmissouri.org – “Using Discipline Data to Assess and Address Disproportionality”](#)

[Pbis.org – PBIS Disproportionality Data Guidebook](#)

[PBIS World Tier 1 Strategies](#)

[Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network](#)

[USDOE: School Climate & Student Discipline Resources](#)

Interventions are targeted and focused on SOME students who require additional supports beyond the universal tier.

Behavior Contracting/Problem-Solving:

- A behavior contract is a personalized agreement between a student and a school professional that outlines specific behavioral expectations, goals, and rewards or consequences. It aims to motivate and guide students toward improved behavior and academic performance.
- Check In/Check Out (CICO) is a behavior contracting method that involves structured daily check-ins and check-outs, paired with daily behavioral reports. It often succeeds for students seeking positive adult interaction.
- Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS) is the evidence-based, trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming model of care that helps caregivers focus on identifying the problems that are causing concerning behaviors in students and solving those problems collaboratively and proactively.

Mentoring:

- Mentoring offers individualized support, positive role modeling, and a flexible approach to guidance. Mentors provide support, encouragement, and guidance to help mentees achieve their goals, build self-esteem, develop problem-solving skills, and reduce risky behaviors.
- Check & Connect is an evidence-based intervention with a mentorship focus, designed to support students who are at risk of disengaging from school. It is often used in educational settings to promote school attendance, positive behavior, and academic success, especially for students who face various challenges that might hinder their educational progress.

Skill-Based Instruction:

- Skill-based instruction, often occurring in small groups, provides targeted support with academic, behavioral, and/or social/emotional needs.
- Academic support may include executive functioning skills that support a student's ability to be successful in a classroom setting.
- Behavioral skills groups may focus on topics such as anger management or violence prevention.
- Social/emotional skills groups may focus on topics such as identifying feelings and developing coping skills.

Restorative Practices and Mediation/Conflict Resolution:

- Through restorative practices, emphasis is on repairing harm, promoting accountability, and facilitating healing and reconciliation.
- Through mediation/conflict resolution, a trained mediator guides the process in a safe and structured environment with the goal of reaching a resolution that addresses the harm caused, accountability, and reconciliation.
- Through restitution and amends, individuals accept responsibility and repair any harm caused.

Self-Monitoring Instruction:

- Self-monitoring interventions teach students to track and record their behavior/emotions.
- Self-monitoring supports students in achieving goals set through self-tracking, reflection, and feedback.

Structured Breaks:

- Structured breaks provide planned opportunities for students to pause and manage their behaviors and emotions.
- Breaks are often used to promote proactive behavior management, individualized planning, and self-regulation, and to reduce overstimulation.

Student Assistance Program Team Referrals:

- Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a team process used to mobilize school resources to remove barriers to learning. SAP is designed to assist in identifying issues including alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues that pose a barrier to a student's success. The primary goal is to help students overcome these barriers so that they may achieve, advance, and remain in school.
- The core of the SAP is a professionally trained team, including school staff and liaisons from community drug and alcohol and mental health agencies. SAP team members are trained to identify issues, determine whether or not the presenting issue lies within the responsibility of the school, and to make recommendations to assist the student and the parent.
- When the issue lies beyond the scope of the school, the SAP team will assist the parent/caregiver and student to access services within the community.
- SAP team members do not diagnose, treat, or refer to treatment. The team may refer a student to a liaison who may screen or assess for further community-based services and support.

Additional Resources can be accessed at:

[California Technical Assistance Center on PBIS: Breaks are Better](#)

[Check In Check Out Video Tutorial Educational Behavior Intervention](#)

[Ci3T: Self-monitoring interventions](#)

[Collaborative & Proactive Solutions \(CPS\)](#)

[IRIS: Self-monitoring](#)

[Maryland DOE: Restorative Practices](#)

[National Center on Intensive Interventions](#)

[National Mentoring Resource Center](#)

[PBIS World: Structured Breaks](#)

[Schott Foundation: Toolkit & Infographics: What Are Restorative Practices](#)

[Student Assistance Program \(SAP\)](#)

[Understood.org: Brain Breaks](#)

[University of Minnesota: Check & Connect](#)

[University of Nebraska: Student Engagement Project: Behavior Contracting](#)

[University of Nebraska: Student Engagement Project: Mediation/Conflict Resolution](#)

[University of Nebraska: Student Engagement Project: Restitution and Amends](#)

Interventions are intensive and individualized for a FEW students who require additional behavioral supports.

Provide Opportunities for Community Service:

- Community service activities include supervised work experiences where students have the opportunity to learn important skills and to strengthen engagement with their school and local community.
- Schools might partner with local nonprofit organizations to organize opportunities such as: helping at other schools, serving on clean-up crews, or working in community agencies. Schools might partner with local nonprofit organizations to organize these opportunities.

Conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment of Student Behavior:

- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is an evidence-based process for identifying the function of behaviors of concern along with the environmental antecedents (what happened before the behavior of concern occurred) and the consequences (what happened after the behavior of concern occurred) that are maintaining the behaviors of concern.
- Through this data collection process, a hypothesis defining the function(s) of the behavior is developed. This information drives the development of an individualized positive behavior support plan (PBSP).

Develop Coordinated Behavior Plans/Action Plans:

- Individualized positive behavior support plans (PBSP) focus on strategies to address behavior that interferes with learning. Effective plans contain specific intervention strategies that focus on increasing desirable behaviors, replacing maladaptive behaviors, reinforcing expected replacement behaviors, and withholding reinforcement of the maladaptive behaviors.

- Behavior plans are based on data collected during the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) process. Ongoing data analysis is conducted to determine if progress is being made and to modify intervention strategies as necessary.
- School teams should consider creating an action plan that outlines steps to transition to the least restrictive environment (LRE) with supports and services to promote successful integration when a student is temporarily away from school.

Consider Counseling Services or Psychological Counseling as a Related Service:

- Using data to inform Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) efforts to promote student well-being is essential.
- The use of data encompasses academic support, social-emotional-behavioral support, data-based decision-making and accountability, family-school collaboration, culturally responsive and trauma-informed care practices, and parent training and equitable access.

Utilize Innovative Student Programming:

- Intended to meet the student's individual needs while ensuring continued access to education, innovative student programming provides tailored changes to a student's schedule, classes, or programs.
- This may include independent study, work experience, alternate times, and other creative programming modifications.

In-School Suspension (ISS) Reframed for Student Support:

- Effective ISS programs must target each student's academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Small group and/or individual instruction in problem-solving, social skills, and executive functioning should be considered. Skilled professionals should be in place to provide the instruction needed and to be a supportive resource for each student. (Strawhun et. al. 2015).

- At the most basic level, ISS programs have the following components:
 - Adequate physical, dedicated space
 - Appropriately placed personnel who can provide students participating in ISS programs with supervision and a variety of cognitive and noncognitive supports
 - Consistent criteria and rules
 - A consistent referral process
 - A comprehensive evaluation process
 - Communication with primary caregivers
 - Prevention and intervention
 - Data collection and analysis
- Note: For youth receiving special education services who are assigned ISS, their individualized education programs (IEPs) must be implemented while in ISS. Contact your special education administration to ensure compliance with special education laws and regulations.

Coordinate With Outside Agencies:

- Outside agencies provide services in collaboration with school personnel. This wraparound support includes a team of professionals that develops a coordinated strengths-based plan that can be implemented across settings.
- Wraparound services are individualized mental health services provided by various agencies in the home, school, or community.
- Within the school setting, specially trained personnel from wraparound agencies implement intervention strategies to increase positive behaviors and collect data to document student progress.
- Supporting agencies may be able to provide school-based mental health services through collaboration with the local schools.
- The Student Assistance Program (SAP) team and school mental health professionals, such as school social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors, can help by connecting students with community agency support.

Person-Centered and Person-Driven Planning:

- Person-centered and person-driven planning are ongoing collaborative, problem-solving team processes that focus on an individual's well-being and vision of what they would like to do in the future.
- Both processes require the person of focus to participate in meetings, identify individuals (including support personnel) who should attend the meetings, and decide what skills, training, and resources are needed to achieve their goals.
- The process leads to creating a vision and an action plan to make the individual's hopes and dreams a reality.

Additional Resources can be accessed at:

[Arizona Developmental Disabilities Council: Future Planning Workbook](#)

[Center on PBIS: Function-Based Support: An Overview](#)

[Center on PBIS-Mental Health/Social-Emotional-Behavioral Well-Being](#)

[Center on PBIS: Remote Instruction as Suspension: Concerns and Guidance](#)

[Center on PBIS: Tier 3 Comprehensive Functional Behavior Assessment \(FBA\) Guide](#)

[I Know Me](#)

[I'm Determined](#)

[Institute for Education Sciences \(IES\)-Using Data to Support MTSS Efforts to Promote Student Well-Being](#)

[International Institute for Restorative Practices \(IIRP\)](#)

[IRIS: Functional Behavioral Assessment](#)

[IRIS: Functional Behavioral Assessment: Identifying the Reasons for Problem Behavior and Developing a Behavior Plan](#)

[National Resource Center for Supportive Decision-Making](#)

[National Wraparound Initiative](#)

[PA Department of Education: Office of School Climate and Well-Being](#)

[PA Department of Education: Staffing ISS](#)

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[PA Department of Human Services:
Person-Centered Planning](#)

[PA School Code: Exclusion from Classes-In-School
Suspension](#)

[PA Student Assistance Program \(SAP\)](#)

[PaTTAN: Annotated Positive Behavior Support Plan](#)

[PaTTAN: Functional Behavior Assessment Process](#)

[PaTTAN: Person-Driven Planning](#)

[PaTTAN: Psychological Counseling as a Related
Service](#)

[Schott Foundation: Restorative Practices](#)

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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Josh Shapiro, Governor

