

Leveraging PBIS to Create Healthier Schools

School Districts Seek School Environments that are Consistent, Predictable, Positive, and Safe.

What is PBIS?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health. PBIS improves social emotional competence, academic success, and school climate when implemented with fidelity. It also improves teacher health and wellbeing. It is a way to create positive, predictable, and safe learning environments where everyone thrives.

The Cascade School District's mission is "engaging every student every day in character development and rigorous education." Superintendent Joni Stevenson and district staff take that very seriously.

The K-12 school has seen its academic performance increase and sustain those gains, thus the district decided it was time to put a greater focus on engaging every student every day in character developments. The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework is how the district is doing that.

It's been a success. The school is in its second year of implementing PBIS and is part of a three-district cohort with the Notus and Parma school districts. They are learning best practices for becoming PBIS schools and districts that operate in fidelity through a three-year training opportunity funded by the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health (BCIF).

"PBIS fits very nicely within our school district's mission," Stevenson said. "The common language for behavior expectations is very powerful in our day-to-day interactions and decision making. It has boosted our culture of pride in personal character development. Our parents and students love the positive

recognition and noticing when kids are doing the right things. It was a simple piece that we were missing that I believe has gained us a great deal of trust with our families."

PBIS is an evidence-based framework that schools can use to support the academic, behavioral, emotional, mental, and social health of students. PBIS is one way Idaho schools can address the youth behavioral health crisis that's happening in Idaho. There are several factors that contribute to the crisis and schools and districts are looking for the best way to support youth and their families .

BCIF supports this work because of the proven connection between academic outcomes and health outcomes. Idaho is experiencing a youth behavioral health crisis, and schools are reporting increases in student mental health issues and problem behaviors. Since all 44 Idaho counties have a behavioral health provider shortage, school districts are looking for other ways to help students and families. Positive changes in school culture and environment can prevent behavioral issues from occurring.

"When you support behavior, you also are supporting academic performance and we're always looking to improve that," said Alicia Caiola, a middle school teacher in Notus.

Dr. Katie Azevedo is an expert on PBIS implementation. She is guiding the three school districts through their implementation process. PBIS is built on a three-tiered approach. The districts have completed their Tier 1 training and started on Tier 2.

“We’re thinking about the kind of climate and culture we are trying to create for students and also the school staff and families who come in,” Azevedo said. “They’ve all firmed up their behavioral expectations. We’re doing PBIS as it’s meant to be done. We know that schools in Idaho can look very different from each other, but they have those core elements in place.”

One of those core elements is consistency, something all schools in this learning cohort recognize. When students know what’s acceptable and what’s expected, what the rewards and consequences are for their actions, those desired behaviors are more often achieved.

“If you don’t have consistent framework for behavior, especially with our kiddos that are inconsistent or have less structure at home, it doesn’t work,” said Jennifer Wright, the principal at Notus Junior-Senior High. “I think that it’s about consistency. It’s about structure.”

Parma High principal Monique Jensen agrees. She’s been a teacher in the district for 25 years, including the past six in her current role. She’s noticed behavioral changes in the school. One example she and her staff cited during a recent session with Azevedo was how students were treating a new, special-needs student at the school. Their interactions have been almost all exemplary.

Students have been following Parma’s PRIDE mantra, which stands for Positive, Respectful, Individual responsibility, Demonstrate excellence and Ensure safety. Cascade (The Rambler Way) and Notus (Four Rs) have similar ways to remind students. Signage in common areas and in classrooms help.

“This is super important because we live in a world where we are so anxious, worried and uptight and the focus is always on the negative,” Jensen said. “We want our kids to be productive in society. We are seeing more positive behaviors.”

Notus is a district that was using PBIS in its elementary school but not the high school until it began implementing as a part of the learning cohort. Sherrill Skelton, a biology and life science teacher has seen a difference.

“We’re all on the same page and it brings the staff and kids together,” she said. “We want the best for kids. That’s when you see results – when the kids feel safe, they have a good time at school. It’s not just one day, it’s everyday with at least two adults getting positive with a student, and that’s what they need.”

Notus school counselor Nate Holm is happy to see the junior-senior high add PBIS to help the transition of students from elementary to secondary school.

“It’s really a combination of building relationships with them and being consistent,” he said. “To have this strategy carry over to both buildings – I think we’re going to see the benefits of that.”

Each of the schools and districts has a PBIS leadership team, which learns from Azevedo as a part of the cohort, then takes those lessons and shares with the rest of the staff.

“The training has been good to get our PBIS Leadership Team on the same page and we have strong forward movement,” Stevenson said. “Our team meets once a month at a minimum to identify next steps and analyze progress. We have monthly student celebrations assemblies, and we talk a lot about The Rambler Way.”

Notus implemented a student leadership team that helps brainstorm celebrations. The group even runs the school’s Monday morning assemblies.

“That’s been a game-changer,” Wright said.

The educators in this cohort recommend PBIS to districts that may be thinking about implementing the framework to help their students thrive. Both Wright and Caiola had been in PBIS with the Kuna School District before moving to Notus in 2015 and 2017, which is one reason why Notus adopted PBIS.

“Our community is really great,” Wright said. “They trust us. Our school board does a blue ribbon award for their PBIS 4 Rs every school board meeting when they give out an award to the staff, so they’re a part of this, too.”

Stevenson said PBIS has shifted school culture in a positive, meaningful way.

“The culture shift will positively impact our students for many years to come,” she said. “PBIS is simple with universal ideas worth exploring. The financial investment can be minimal, and there are a lot of great resources online that can help schools/districts get started in the work immediately.”

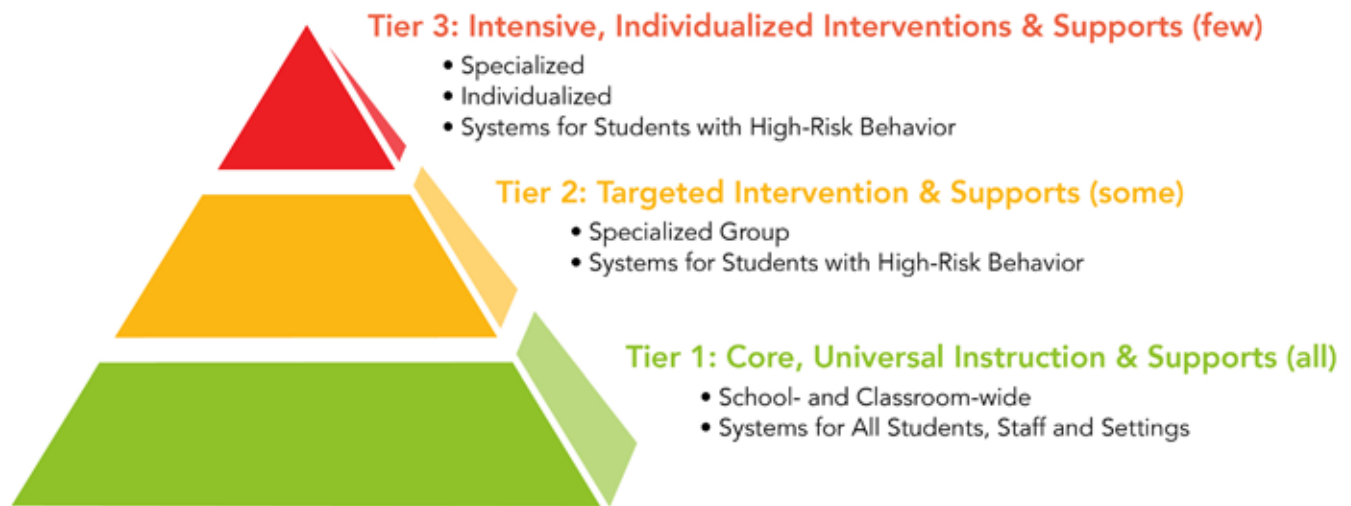
If your school district is interested in implementing district wide PBIS, please contact Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health Senior Program Officer Jackie Yarbrough at: jjarbrough@bcdahofoundation.org.

“We must have a comprehensive approach to tackle Idaho’s youth behavioral health crisis from all directions, and this includes prevention and intervention resources,” Yarbrough said. “Our students, families, and schools still need behavioral health counselors and clinicians, but we have to assist schools to prevent mental health issues and problem behaviors from occurring in the first place. PBIS does that.”

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Tiered Model of Behavior Health Prevention and Supports in Schools



Source: PBIS.org

Tier 1: Universal, Primary Prevention

Tier 1 systems, data, and practices support everyone – students, educators, and staff – across all school settings. They establish a foundation for positive and proactive support. Tier 1 support is robust, differentiated, and enables most (80% or more) students to experience success.

Tier 2: Targeted, Secondary Prevention

Students receiving Tier 2 supports get an added layer of systems, data, and practices targeting their specific needs. On average, about 10-15% of students will need some type of Tier 2 support. The support is more focused than at Tier 1 and less intensive than at Tier 3.

Tier 3: Intensified and Individualized, Tertiary Prevention

There are a small number (1-5%) of students for whom Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports have not been sufficient to experience success. At Tier 3, students receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their outcomes. Tier 3 supports are available to any student with intensive need.



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with schools and community
organizations to ensure Idaho
youth thrive.**



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