



PBIS Positive Behavioral
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HIGH SCHOOL PBIS IMPLEMENTATION: STUDENT VOICE

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Buy-in is an important component in the successful adoption, full implementation, and sustainability of any school-based initiative (e.g., Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). In high schools, one key way to increase buy-in is to incorporate student voice. Since adolescents have a developmental need to play an active role in their own lives, students who are included in decision-making and implementation are more likely to accept and participate in the initiative (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner, 2013). This brief discusses the importance of student voice, describes the unique features of high school settings that can make it challenging to include students, and offers strategies to address these barriers.



Rationale

Researchers have identified three unique contextual characteristics that influence the overall implementation of the PBIS framework in high schools: size, organizational culture, and developmental level of the students (Flannery et al., 2013; Flannery & Kato, 2017). Below we briefly describe these key differences and their potential impact on meaningfully incorporating student voice.

Size

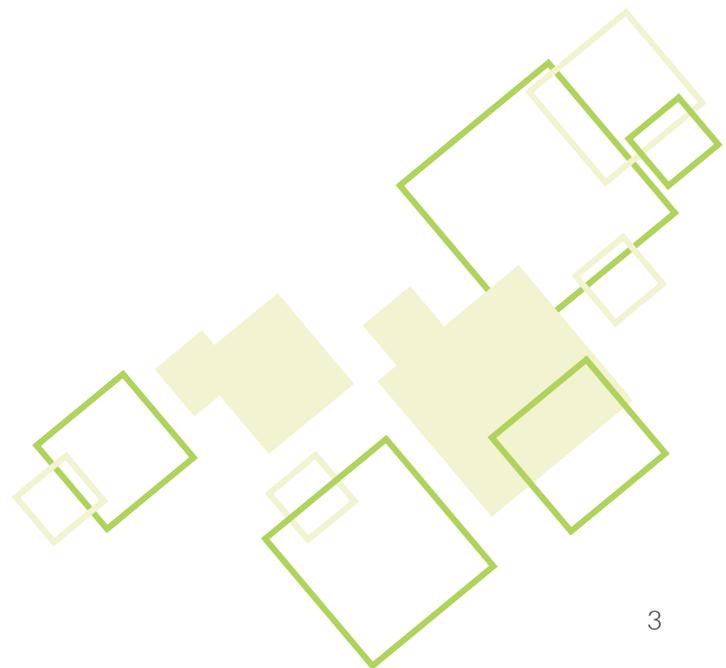
High schools are usually physically larger with greater numbers of students and staff. With larger class sizes and multiple classes throughout the day, it may be harder for teachers to get to know students. The larger size can impact communication, the ability to collaborate, and the opportunity to participate on school-wide teams.

Organizational Culture

The organizational culture of high schools is often centered on academics rather than social-emotional-behavioral skills. Teachers sometimes believe that high school students have mastered behavioral and self-management skills, negating the need for teaching and reinforcing school expectations. Classes are often organized by content area that might result in schools not seeking input school-wide. This might lead to a lack of diverse student voice within the organizational structure.

Developmental Level

Adolescence includes an increased desire for independence and an enhanced need for peer interaction. Students want the opportunity to be more autonomous and less reliant on adults and to be actively involved in decision-making.





High School Specific Examples

In order to better understand PBIS implementation in high school settings, we conducted a series of interviews with high school PBIS coaches, team leaders, and administrators. We organized the specific examples by adapting a version of Hart's Ladder (Fletcher, 2005; Fletcher, n.d.; Hart, 1992) to represent student voice along a continuum of participation. The examples below range from high to minimal levels of student engagement within this continuum.

Student-Initiated, Shared Decisions With Adults.

Students develop and share their ideas with staff. The students may provide written reports, have their own student team, or serve as a student representative on the school team. Both students and staff come to a consensus on which ideas to implement.

- At one school, there was a student-only PBIS team that met every other week to discuss ways to increase student engagement school-wide. Their ideas were shared with the core PBIS team and together, both groups collectively decided what to implement school-wide.

Student-Initiated, Student-Led Decision.

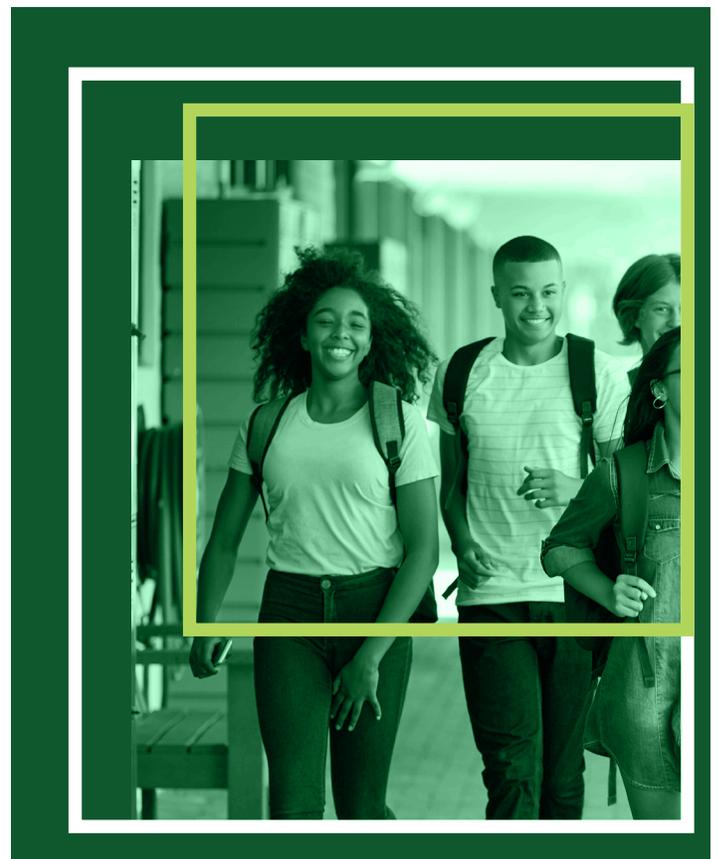
Students develop and share their ideas with staff. Students make the decisions on what to share.

- Students developed questions and collected responses using QR codes and Google Forms. The student leadership team summarized the results and developed suggestions.

Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions With Students.

Staff develop and share ideas with students. Both students and staff come to a consensus on which ideas to implement.

- Staff showed students sample video lessons created at another school. The school staff asked the students for feedback on how to improve the video lessons. Staff then used the students' feedback to develop their own school videos.
- The school created a preferred parking spot that students could earn access based on positive behavior. Students suggested moving this "rewarded parking spot" to a location closer to the front office, and the school moved the location.





Adult-Initiated, Adult-Led Decision; Student-Informed And Consulted

Staff develop and share ideas with students. Both students and staff come to a consensus on which ideas to implement, and may not use the student feedback.

- Students were surveyed annually on topics such as rewards, values (e.g., what makes them proud and happy), perspectives on the discipline policy and procedures, and experiences as freshman at the school.
- Staff reached out to students to get their input on different types of rewards when students were not choosing the available items.
- Superintendent and administration met with a randomly selected group of students within the school building to solicit their input on what was needed to improve the school.

Resources

[High School Practice Brief: Staff Buy-In ¹](#)

[Consider Context: Implementation in Secondary Schools ²](#)

[School-Wide PBIS Implementation in High Schools: Current Practice and Future Directions ³](#)

[Lessons Learned on Implementation of PBIS in High Schools: Current Trends and Future Directions ⁴](#)

[Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports ⁵](#)

1. <https://www.pbis.org/Common/Cms/files/pbisresources/High%20School%20PBIS%20Implementation-%20Staff%20Buy-In.pdf>
2. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/1256/consider-context-implementation-in-secondary-schools>
3. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/1004/school-wide-pbis-implementation-in-high-schools-current-practice-and-future-directions>
4. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/1257/lessons-learned-on-implementation-of-pbis-in-high-schools>
5. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/1001/schoolwide-positive-behavior-supports>

Adult-Initiated, Adult-Led Decision; Student-Informed And Assigned.

Staff develop and share ideas. Students are assigned the task of putting the ideas into place.

- Students helped to develop the new school-wide expectations, logo, postcards, posters, etc.
- Students were asked to be in charge of the school store.
- In one school, students could write “green cards” that celebrated/recognized teachers.

Summary

Incorporating student voice in a meaningful way in high schools requires creativity due to the large number of students and staff and the organizational culture of the school. Given what we know about adolescent development, allowing for student voice is critical for building stakeholder support. This brief identifies some of the effective strategies high schools have used to include student voice.





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