

# PBIS in Juvenile Justice Programs: Planning for Long-Term Implementation

*This Practice Brief was developed as result of the roundtable dialogue that occurred at the 2019 PBIS Leadership Forum in Chicago, IL.*

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This document is intended to be a practical tool and resource for anyone who is leading or supporting PBIS in juvenile justice programs or other types of alternative, residential programs. We will describe common reasons that can prevent sustainability of PBIS over time, and recommendations for enhancing sustainability.

## Overview

The last decade has witnessed expanded interest in potential benefits of PBIS applied within secure juvenile correctional facilities and other alternative settings (Scheuermann & Nelson, 2019). Several state initiatives have reported decreases in major and minor behavioral infractions resulting from appropriate implementation of PBIS practices (Jolivette, 2016). Of specific interest for this brief is the long-term sustainability of practices that have produced encouraging outcomes initially. PBIS's expansion from public schools to alternative settings must be considered in early stages, yet anecdotal indicators have emerged suggesting challenges with long-term implementation, particularly after the turnover of personnel who were early advocates of PBIS in these alternative settings. Early indications suggest that without targeted planning for long-term implementation, positive outcomes do not automatically translate into long-term cultural shifts that sustain themselves regardless of personnel in leadership roles.

## Inquiry

The last decade's experience with PBIS in juvenile justice and other alternative settings has enabled an improved understanding of unique opportunities and challenges in such settings compared to traditional public schools. Experiences of early adopters within these alternative settings, including consultants, technical assistants and coaches who facilitate implementation, suggest that planning for long-term implementation requires additional response to the unique opportunities and challenges presented. This RDQ sought input from participants about their planning experiences and resulting beliefs in light of practice that may improve long-term implementation.



## Sustainability

According to Han and Weiss (2005), sustainability is defined as ongoing implementation of an intervention, practice, or program, with fidelity to the core principles of the intervention, even after initial support resources have been withdrawn. A generally accepted standard for sustainability of PBIS in traditional schools is 3 to 5 years of successful implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

Sustainability of PBIS should not be assumed or taken for granted. Any new initiative has the potential to be susceptible to forces that can weaken the initiative to the point where it disappears. In the early stages of planning and implementation, steps should be taken to mitigate factors that may impede long-term, sustained implementation. Over time, continued attention to the core features and systems of PBIS will help to ensure that implementation continues with fidelity. Scheuermann and Nelson (2019) have identified the following practices as important to sustainability:

- Build buy-in and plan for support and leadership from program, facility, and/or agency leadership
- Build buy-in from staff
- Establish PBIS leadership teams at the facility and central office level that are representative of the disciplines that provide services for youth
- Ensure relevant data are easily accessible to PBIS coordinators, leaders, and teams; ideally, the data system should be able to produce disaggregated (by location, time, behavior, and other variables of interest) reports, preferably in graph formats that facilitate analyses
- Plan infrastructure support needed to facilitate implementation with fidelity and to sustain PBIS over time
- Design PBIS features and systems in ways that respect local contexts, cultures, and values, while maintaining the core principles inherent in each feature or system
- Develop policies and procedures to support continuous regeneration of PBIS

## Roundtable Dialogue Participants and Topics

Participants included representatives holding diverse roles from a broad spectrum of juvenile justice facilities and other alternative settings. Voices included a national director for research and technical assistance; a technical assistant for a statewide PBIS initiative; a school principal; and a representative in a statewide role working with psychological rehabilitation facilities. Other voices included county level behavior support personnel; behavior coaches, at least some of whom hold board-certified behavior analyst credentials; social emotional support personnel within school district operations; a statewide Education representative in juvenile justice settings; and front-line correctional officers in a state-run facility.



Many treatment staff will appreciate that reducing minor day-to-day problem behaviors through PBIS, can help treatment teams respond and intervene more effectively in the complex socioemotional, cognitive-behavioral, and interpersonal needs of incarcerated adolescents. Both authors have worked with treatment providers who state that they are able to conduct therapeutic treatment groups more effectively when Tier 1 PBIS practices are in place, which reduces low-level problem behaviors that could disrupt group processes.

Thus, helping all staff within a facility understand how PBIS integrates with other treatment and programming activities may facilitate buy-in. Not making these connections runs the risk of PBIS being viewed by staff as “yet another” add-on responsibility.

***PBIS Leadership Team Considerations.*** Compared to public schools, correctional care facilities historically have had less of an egalitarian culture and more of an authoritarian culture driven by top-down directives. Reasons for this include the overarching priorities of safety and security and a need for structure that can respond quickly to critical events and take decisive action when needed. The authoritative orientation assumes heightened relevance when addressing deeply embedded practices.

Accordingly, the PBIS leadership team needs to have a clear vision of what they want to accomplish with PBIS. The team needs individuals with decision-making authority, and should be kept to a manageable size. The PBIS team will be well-served to limit its size to 6-8 personnel who can flush out necessary considerations and reach consensus. Of note, Blenko, Mankins and Rogers (2010) reported that each additional person on a workgroup after seven reduces the workgroup’s decision effectiveness by ten percent. An odd numbered membership facilitates decisions when facing a split vote, but the spirit of PBIS calls for consensus as much as possible. An even numbered workgroup may help demonstrate consensus over tight decisions.

Notwithstanding a PBIS team of limited size, many decisions benefit from and need broad conversation and input prior to settlement. We recommend that an efficiently sized PBIS team make liberal use of task forces or work groups with broad participation to make recommendations for the PBIS team’s consideration.

***Sequence of Initiatives.*** PBIS leadership teams are advised to be mindful about the sequence of PBIS plans. By beginning with “low hanging fruit” (i.e., achievements that are relatively easy to reach), the team can build upon a sense of celebration and momentum. With previous wins of modest complexity, the team will be in better position to tackle more challenging problems moving forward. Following are a few examples:

- One secure care facility started PBIS in their Education program. The first activities they implemented, after they developed their rules matrices, were activities for active teaching of expectations. The PBIS team decided to start with these activities because this was a familiar component that could be implemented relatively quickly, was familiar to the teaching staff, and required little in the way of modifying typical daily routines in the classroom. Other Tier 1 components were implemented over time, but starting with teaching activities was a way for staff to experience PBIS in a familiar way. Also, staff reported positive effects on youth behavior with the teaching activities alone, which enhanced their openness to other Tier 1 components.

*Solicit Input on PBIS Components.* One practice that appears to strengthen buy-in is to obtain input about PBIS components. Obtaining staff input is particularly important in the early stages of planning components. One facility used an iterative process in which the leadership team drafted components (e.g., rules matrices), then made those available to all staff for feedback. The team then incorporated that feedback and sent that draft for staff approval before finalizing the rules posters, lesson plans, and other components. Giving staff this much say about PBIS components that they will be expected to implement on a daily basis may lead to better staff support and implementation for those components. Following are ideas generated by our RDQ participants:

- A popular method of tracking consensus involved using red, green and yellow markers with which staff could quickly identify and share how they were feeling about any given component under consideration.
- During the planning stages, it would be useful to use a memorable acronym for reference to the general overarching expectations, or a facility motto that can “brand” PBIS. Sites without a memorable acronym face additional challenges in training staff to remember and sustain behavioral expectations proactively.
- Another means of getting staff input into general behavioral expectations and rules matrices is to ensure the matrices capture all significant locations and activities where youth spend time and ensure staff responsible for those locations and times have input.
- Consider a regular cycle of feedback through formalized processes when beneficial (e.g., monthly, quarterly, or annually to shape behavioral expectations over time).

*Ensure Contextual Match.* Agencies and facilities must adapt aspects of PBIS to fit their local customs and culture, while retaining essential features of the PBIS approach. Celebrations, for example, will be more meaningful if they reflect local values and meaning. Sometimes a contextual match can be achieved simply by relabeling a practice. “It’s all in the packaging,” says a practitioner who works with group homes and alternative psychological rehabilitation settings. The practitioner shared a story of a facility that objected to using point cards for youth. However, with a modest revamping, the facility was pleased to use stamp cards instead, which carried the same function as the point cards.

**Initial Orientation.** Front line staff must begin by knowing generally what PBIS is trying to accomplish. They need a general orientation to understand PBIS and the basic behavioral principles and terminology upon which many PBIS practices are based. Such introductory training should address potential areas of confusion and anticipated errors of learning, as well as provide direct instruction in Tier 1 components. Following are recommendations for initial orientation from colleagues with experience leading PBIS in secure care:

- Time will be well spent to review existing curricula, policies, and procedures prior to any training, to search for pre-existing messages that may be inconsistent with PBIS.
- Training should address those contradictory messages, giving guidance to staff about how to negotiate any contradictions.
- Training should also address current ways of interacting with youth that may need to be done differently with PBIS. For example, rather than saying, “You’re out of dress code!”, in PBIS we would remind the youth of the rule regarding dress code.
- Training should also address common misperceptions. For example, one common misperception is that PBIS is simply “behavior modification” that consists only of rewards. Be sure to highlight the range of evidence-based Tier 1 practices (establishing clear and specific expectations, actively teaching expectations, establishing consistent responses to minor misbehavior, etc.). Further, when introducing the PBIS acknowledgement systems, it may be helpful to counter common complaints about “rewards” (e.g., rewards are the same as bribery, if I give a youth a reward, she’ll expect it for everything she does, rewards are bad).
- Because juvenile justice staff historically are taught not to interact with youth in ways that could be perceived as inappropriate relationships, introducing PBIS should include teaching staff PBIS practices that facilitate healthy relationships. For example, giving specific verbal acknowledgment for rule-following behaviors is a healthy and appropriate practice, and can facilitate improved and healthy relationships between staff and youth.

Getting ahead of these anticipated areas of confusion and misunderstanding will go a long way to staff being more open and receptive to PBIS, in part because you are helping them unlearn information that may interfere with their motivation to use PBIS with fidelity.

Establishing staff buy-in for PBIS is important in the early stages of planning and development. But our roundtable discussion participants also suggested that maintaining staff support over time is important. We discussed the following activities as a way to promote ongoing staff motivation for PBIS.

*Refresher and Advanced Training.* Once staff begin implementing PBIS, they may need additional instruction in implementing certain PBIS components with fidelity. When fidelity of implementation is achieved, additional training in more advanced components may be indicated, or training in additional tiers of support. As staff become more familiar with PBIS concepts and practices, continued training can lead to a deeper understanding of what they are doing and why.

- Use of teacher workdays for training may allow non-teaching staff to train together with the teaching staff. Combined learning opportunities help to improve common buy-in and understanding.
- As a technique for clarifying learning, our discussion participants identified the use of non-examples, as well as examples, to be as useful for training staff as they are for training youth. Including non-examples in training is a useful method for not only pre-correcting errors (when used during initial training), but also for correcting implementation errors after the PBIS initiative begins.
- To help identify target areas in refresher training, it can be helpful to give staff a way to submit questions or concerns about PBIS practices. These can be addressed in the next refresher training, or through regular staff communications.

*Data Collection and Reporting.* Participants generally agreed that staff become more invested to the extent they can rely on data analyses to be shared widely and regularly. Staff buy in is helped particularly if the data is timely (no more than a month old) and in a user-friendly format such as charts or graphs. Data charts that show “rates” of behavior, i.e., data controlled for number of days per month and daily census changes, are more useful for comparing monthly behavioral trends. Aside from charting behavioral infractions (major and minor), graphic information that reflects positive achievements also helps to provide a foundation for well-earned celebrations. Transparent use of data is helpful, enabling others to analyze patterns and trends for themselves. To the extent others can analyze data, it is important to ensure availability of open communication with the PBIS team to address areas of interest or concern.

Optimal use of data will reflect two different purposes of data collection: fidelity assessment and measuring progress toward desired outcomes. Each must be supported by its own processes to ensure useful results. In addition, it is useful to recall that data collection is different from data-based decision-making. In participants’ experience, data collection is often a more robust activity than using data for making decisions. Agencies and facilities may benefit from seeking opportunities to practice data-based decision-making, gradually expanding applications with increased experience. Finally, participants have found that student and climate survey data may be useful for identifying areas of promise and potential improvement opportunities.

## What infrastructure does a facility need to support and sustain PBIS?

Initial planning should take into account resources that will be needed to sustain PBIS over time and ensure that those resources will be available (Scheuermann & Nelson, 2019). Resources can include funding for training and materials, but should also factor in other resources, such as time and personnel needed to fully implement PBIS activities. Of course, a core PBIS goal is to “work smarter, not harder.” This means that PBIS should not simply be added on to other programming activities and staff responsibilities. Rather, PBIS leadership teams should review existing budgets, teams, and behavior management programs to prevent duplication of efforts and to determine efficient allocation of resources.

Participants in the roundtable discussion offered the following ideas related to ensuring sufficient infrastructure and resources for PBIS:

**Budget.** Give essential elements of PBIS line items in the budget. Tie the budget items to goals within the budget structure so that collectively, the line items support fundamental operations aligned with PBIS principals. Line items can help to ensure formal understanding of who has ultimate responsibility for support and the means to provide it. Specific line items will vary based on facility resources and needs. In some manner, however, resources should be available for functions related to staff development, outside expertise and support, data collection and reporting, incentives and rewards/celebrations, and meeting time for staff.

**Team Meeting Time.** PBIS teams need time to meet; even if occasionally, comp time or overtime may be implicated. The PBIS tenet of “working smarter, not harder,” suggests that a review of all meetings is indicated to see where redundancies may be eliminated and needed coordination may be streamlined.

**Dedicated Personnel Roles.** Dedicated PBIS coaches offer continuity, on site technical assistance and increased capacity to implement PBIS with fidelity. Participants regarded coaching as a beneficial, if not required, activity. One coach, however, cannot meet all the behavioral and academic needs present at a facility. Facilities benefit from different kinds of coaches to build capacity systemically. Relatedly, staff required to complete PBIS related activities must have time available to complete their assignments.

**Data Capabilities.** Data collection and reporting is a fundamental aspect of PBIS implementation. To be beneficial for action planning purposes, data must be timely and in graphic format to facilitate understanding. Opportunities should be sought to streamline data collection as feasible, and ensure the data collected can be useful for necessary reporting and/or tied to behavioral expectations.



## What considerations are important in determining whether PBIS will be implemented facility-wide or in a single program?

With origins in typical school settings, PBIS uses many practices that are familiar to educators (e.g., teaching, acknowledging correct responses, using behavioral data to guide decisions). For these reasons, it may be relatively easy for educational leaders in juvenile justice settings to see the value in PBIS, and to perceive PBIS as a natural fit for the school program. For this reason, PBIS sometimes begins in the education programs of juvenile justice settings. Representatives from one facility, however, described using PBIS facility-wide but scaled back in Education to regroup for strategic reasons. In that instance, a different entity contracted to perform the Education function, and wanted to help teachers better understand how PBIS worked.

Costs and benefits of implementing PBIS facility-wide or in a single program should consider trade-offs related to training, coaching, technical assistance, and databases used for behavior management. A capacity to offer trainers, coaches and technical assistance providers on a scale that matches the scope of implementation, has clear benefits in terms of facilitating a consistent approach and philosophy that minimizes staff confusion. Often in-house roles can be adjusted to accommodate the need for trainers and coaches. Databases that are accessible by all programs within a facility offer streamlined opportunities to compile and report useful data across different divisions. Also of note, fidelity is served when staff use language to address behavioral expectations with youth that mirrors language in rules matrices. Common use of staff language across programs facilitates common understanding among staff and youth.

Implementation facility-wide offers potential for higher levels of consistency in expectations and standards for youth behavior, as well as greater consistency in responses to youth behavior across activities, staff, and settings within the facility. Facility-wide implementation can also improve communication across divisions, which may lead to more unified treatment and behavior management systems. Facility-wide implementation may also enhance sustainability of PBIS because more staff and administrators would likely experience the positive effects of PBIS on youth behavior and facility climate. For these reasons, we urge facilities to pursue facility-wide PBIS. If that is not feasible, at least during the early stages of PBIS, we advocate for making facility-wide implementation a goal, and taking specific steps toward that end.

PBIS teams and leaders can raise awareness of and interest in PBIS among staff and administrators in the corrections side of the facility. Our roundtable discussion provided ideas about this, which we describe below, along with additional recommendations. For long range planning toward a facility-wide approach, the following activities are advised:

**Communicate.** Share information about PBIS, formally (presentations, articles in facility or agency newsletter) and informally (conversations). Correct potential misperceptions about PBIS.

**Tout Successes Related to PBIS.** When discipline data or anecdotal data indicate positive effects from PBIS, be sure to make those successes known to colleagues outside of Education. Many administrators are eager to hear positive stories and the entire facility can benefit from sharing them widely.

**Invite Participation.** Invite colleagues from other divisions to represent their division on the PBIS team, and invite staff and administrators to participate in PBIS activities (developing rules matrices, participate in teaching activities and incentive activities, etc.). At one location, top facility leadership and their assistants attended all PBIS meetings. Their enthusiasm permeated to staff. Where mid-level managers appeared to hold modest or little enthusiasm, top leaders invited their participation to observe, which made a big difference to the doubters.

## How do facilities plan for continuous regeneration (monitoring, adjusting, improving)?

Implementation of PBIS requires a long-term vision and plan. The National PBIS Technical Assistance Center recommends developing a 3 to 5-year action plan that includes goals specific to sustaining implementation with high fidelity (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2015). PBIS systems should be dynamic, not static, to allow for PBIS teams to make adjustments as needed, based on data. Because juvenile justice programming is closely regulated by policy, one important consideration in sustainability is to ensure PBIS is included in policy, but that the policy allows for adjustments while maintaining adherence to the essential features and practices of PBIS. Like any organization, juvenile justice facilities must plan for training of new staff, changes in youth population and needs over time, new initiatives that may arise, and other factors that can pose threats to sustaining PBIS. To a certain extent, PBIS policy can attempt to proactively address those potential disruptors, and long-term action plans should include steps to counter potential threats. Roundtable participants recommended the following activities for these purposes:

**Staff Development.** Agencies and facilities need supervisors and administrators to be strong coaches. They need staff leads who understand proactivity, and sustained champion roles who can root out complacency. In the development of coaches, be clear about the staff competencies that PBIS coaches are trying to develop and be clear about the competencies necessary to become a talented coach. Support internal development of staff with a clear plan.

**Be Inclusive.** Adapt a welcoming approach that values broad-based participation, input and recognition for efforts toward implementation with fidelity. Remember the value of sharing information broadly. Post concise minutes from PBIS team meetings quickly with broad distribution. Be clear about the distribution of responsibilities and timelines. Track follow up activities in the minutes so readers can be clear about direction and progress.

**Formalize Agreements.** Where Education and Facilities comprise different entities, formalize mutual understanding with relevant provisions in written agreements related to PBIS. Written agreements will improve mutual accountability and follow through. The period preceding renewal of agreements gives opportunity for progress review and planning to address emerging needs.

**Formalize Celebrations.** Where opportunities exist to celebrate milestones along the path to PBIS implementation with fidelity, cultivate a practice of celebrating achievements with appropriate recognitions of progress and staff contributions.

## Resources

- Juvenile Justice section of National PBIS Technical Assistance Center website
- Session A08- Extending the Reach of PBIS to Novel Environments
- Session B08-PBIS in Secure Care: Considerations for Effective Long-term Sustainability – What Are We Getting Into?
- Session C07 Approaches in Implementing PBIS in Juvenile Correctional Facilities

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