

Why Prioritize Behavior Support?

Educational leaders support students and educators in a number of complementary ways, including (a) promoting physical health and safety; (b) prioritizing high-leverage instructional practices to enhance student learning; (c) emphasizing social (“how we interact”), emotional (“how we feel”), and behavioral (“how we act”)¹ practices to support mental health and well-being; and (d) investing in a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to organize effective practices and build capacity. In addition, leaders develop effective policy, invest in systems change, prioritize evidence-based practice, and monitor implementation and outcomes to promote equity.

In this context, some leaders wonder whether we still need to prioritize behavior support. The short answer is yes! Without effective behavior support, research has documented that students and educators experience negative outcomes, including:

- Increased exclusionary discipline (e.g., office referrals, suspension, expulsion);²
- Lost instructional time and decreased achievement for excluded students and their peers;³
- Particularly poor outcomes for students from marginalized groups, especially Black students and students with disabilities, who are at highest risk of experiencing exclusionary discipline;⁴ and
- Increased educator burnout, resulting in alarming numbers of educators leaving the field.⁵

Supporting student behavior is critical to reduce harmful exclusionary discipline practices and promote full access to instruction for each and every student. To effectively support student behavior, educators create a positive and predictable culture of support and invest in a MTSS framework.

Create a Positive and Predictable Culture of Support

Given the prevalence of challenging school behavior, the question is not *if* educators will address behavior in schools but *how* educators will address behavior. To proactively support social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) skill development and prevent and reduce challenging behavior, effective educators **implement culturally-relevant evidence-based practices** grounded in decades of behavioral science to:

- Create safe, positive, and predictable environments and teach critical SEB skills as the foundation for learning and support;⁶
- Target behavior support for students displaying SEB risk to prevent on-going challenges;⁷ and
- Individualize behavior support to reduce the likelihood of exclusionary discipline and increase the probability of success.⁸

Invest in a MTSS Framework

By effectively supporting student behavior within an evidence-based MTSS framework, like positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), **educators promote student progress**. Rigorous research has shown implementing PBIS with fidelity is related to the following outcomes:

- Improved academic achievement⁹
- Improved attendance¹⁰
- Improved mental health, social-emotional competence, and pro-social behavior¹¹
- Less reported bullying and substance abuse¹²
- Reduced exclusionary discipline¹³
- Increased racial/ethnic equity in school discipline¹⁴
- Improved outcomes for students with disabilities¹⁵
- Improved perceptions of school climate, organizational health, and safety¹⁶
- Improved outcomes for educators (e.g., greater efficacy, reduced stress and burnout)¹⁷

In conclusion, as leaders develop policy and invest in systems that promote evidence-based practice to improve outcomes, it is wise to prioritize academic, social, emotional, **and behavioral** support.

Supporting Citations

- ¹ Chafouleas (2021)
- ² US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2018)
- ³ Perry & Morris (2014)
- ⁴ Lossen & Martinez (2020); Morris & Perry (2016); US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2018); Wagner & Newman (2012)
- ⁵ Herman et al. (2018); Smith & Ingersoll (2004)
- ⁶ Office of Special Education Programs, (2015)
- ⁷ Center on PBIS (2020)
- ⁸ National Center for Intensive Intervention & Center on PBIS (2020)
- ⁹ Algozzine et al. (2012); Horner et al. (2009); Horner et al. (2020); Lee & Gage (2020)
- ¹⁰ Freeman et al. (2016)
- ¹¹ Bradshaw et al. (2012)
- ¹² Bastable et al. (2015); Bradshaw et al. (2012); Ross & Horner (2009); Waasdorp et al. (2012)
- ¹³ Bradshaw et al. (2010); Horner et al. (2009); Horner et al. (2020); Lee & Gage (2020)
- ¹⁴ Gage et al. (2019); McIntosh, Ellwood, et al. (2018); McIntosh, Gion et al. (2018); McIntosh et al. (2021); Swain-Bradway et al. (2019); Vincent et al. (2011)
- ¹⁵ Gage et al. (2019); Grasley-Boy et al. (2019)
- ¹⁶ Bradshaw et al. (2008); Bradshaw et al. (2009); Horner et al. (2009)
- ¹⁷ Kelm & McIntosh (2012); Ross et al. (2012)



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