Straight from the Source: Youth Perspectives on School-wide Positive Behavior Supports

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Agenda

• Who is TBSP?
• Why did we begin this research?
• What was our research process?
• What did we learn?
• How does this inform our work?
• What strategies can you try?
What is your role?
Meet TBSP
RTI²-B In Middle Tennessee

Middle Tennessee

15 Districts

255 Schools
Tennessee’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports is RTI²-B

- Framework to support the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students and schools
- Alignment of initiatives, supports, and resources to address the needs of all students
- The best prevention comes from quality Tier I support in both academics and behavior

(TN Department of Education, 2018)
District Support from TBSP

Training
- In-Person Trainings
- Quarterly Team Lead Meetings
- Online Webinars

Resources
- Briefs & Tip Sheets
- Implementation Spotlights
- How-To Videos
- Example Materials

Ongoing Technical Assistance
- Meetings/Problem Solving
- Support for District Coaches
- Integration and Alignment of Initiatives
Why Focus on Middle School Students?

★ Critical period marked by many transitions:
1. Developmental and social changes
2. Shifting adult and peer dynamics
3. Changes in day-to-day school experience
   - Multiple classes and teachers per day
   - Varying academic and behavioral expectations
   - Conditions fostering competition among peers
   - Increased responsibility

(Akos, 2002; Elias et al., 1985; Johnson & Smith, 2016; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2009; Scales et al., 2020)
Why Focus on Middle School Students?

★ A period of vulnerability to a host of risk factors
  ‣ Stress
  ‣ Decreased motivation
  ‣ Self-criticism
  ‣ Internalizing behaviors
  ‣ Externalizing behaviors

(Akos, 2002; Elias et al., 1985; Johnson & Smith, 2016; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2009; Scales et al., 2020)
Why Focus on Middle School Students?

★ Potential impact of school-wide systems of support
  • Quality of teacher-student relationships as protective factor
  • Perceptions of school climate as protective factor
  • Benefits of incorporating student voice in school reform efforts
    ‣ Impact on sense of agency
    ‣ Impact on sense of belonging and connectedness
    ‣ Impact on competence
    ‣ Impact on attendance and graduation rate

(Flannery, Hershfeldt, & Freeman, 2018)
(Akos, 2002; Elias et al., 1985; Johnson & Smith, 2016; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2009; Scales et al., 2020)
Why “Straight from the Source”?

★ Best practice: incorporating student perspectives
★ Most of what we know about student involvement comes from studies on school personnel and their concerns about
  • Student perceptions of PBIS
  • Student involvement in PBIS
    ‣ How students view acknowledgement systems
    ‣ Whether they are meaningfully involved
    ‣ Whether they understand the purpose of the whole system

Feuerborn et al., 2016; Flannery et al., 2018; Martinez et al., 2019
Purpose of Our Study

If we want to learn about students’ perspectives on PBIS, and whether and how they’d like to be involved, we need to go straight to the source to:

- Examine middle school students’ perspectives on their school’s implementation of PBIS
- Gather student recommendations on how to more actively engage students in PBIS

IRB #180226
Research Questions

1. How do middle school students view PBIS at their school?

2. What impact do students attribute to PBIS at their school?

3. How do they view the overall involvement of students at their school?

4. What recommendations do they have for improving the implementation of PBIS?
School Selection Criteria

- Received technical assistance from TBSP
- Implemented Tier I with fidelity as determined by the TFI
- Provided school and district approval to hold focus groups

TBSP selected the first five schools meeting these inclusion criteria
We schedule one month in between Day 1 and Day 2 of training.
Six Focus Groups

**District Demographics**

- PK-12
  - 14 schools
  - Rural
- PK-8
  - 8 schools
  - Suburban
- PK-12
  - 21 schools
  - Rural
- PK-12
  - 160 schools
  - Urban

**School Demographics**

- 5th-8th
  - 366 students
- 6th-8th
  - 1048 students
- 5th-8th
  - 1093 students
- 5th-8th
  - 748 students
- 5th-6th
  - 579 students
1. School leaders intentionally selected students who:
   - Were on a leadership team
   - Were not on a leadership team
   - Had some involvement with PBIS
   - Could share insights regarding PBIS

2. TBSP provided guidance on selecting diverse groups of students who reflected the student body regarding
   - Demographics
   - Interests
   - Behavior
Participant Demographics:
Six Focus Groups

- Asian: 42%
- Hispanic/Latino: 29%
- Black: 7%
- Multi-Racial: 7%
- White: 2%
- Other: 9%

- 8th grade: 37%
- 7th grade: 29%
- 6th grade: 26%
- 5th grade: 9%
Participant Demographics: Six Focus Groups

- 36% Member of Leadership Team
- 64% Not Member of Leadership Team

- 53% Female
- 47% Male
Focus Group Procedures

- Size ranged from 3-11 students
- Average length was 46 minutes
- Students earned $20 gift cards
- Pseudonyms used to protect students’ identity
- Groups were audio-recorded then transcribed
- Facilitated by TBSP staff who used semi-structured interview protocol

One school had two groups due to high levels of interest, so there were 6 groups across 5 schools.
Focus Group Questions

Semi-Structured interview questions designed to tell us student:

- Perceptions of school climate
- Understanding of PBIS program
- Views on impact of PBIS
- Recommendations for changes
- Current level of involvement
- Ideas to improve student involvement

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Final Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe the culture and climate of your school? What would you tell another kid if they asked what your school was like?
   
   Follow up questions, as necessary:
   a. Tell us about your school-wide expectations.
   b. Tell us about your school’s acknowledgement system.
   c. What rewards have you earned?
   d. How do you learn about [the program]?

2. Why do you think the school chose to adopt [the program]? What issues do you think they were trying to address?

3. Why do you think [the program] is making a difference at your school? Why or why not?
   
   Follow up questions, as necessary:
   a. Do you think [the program] has made those issues better? Made them worse?
   b. What tells you this is the case? How do you know?
   c. If they are talking a lot about the reward, ask a probing question about if receiving acknowledgement from adults is different than receiving a tangible reward.²

4. What do other kids at your school think or say about [the program]? Are their views very positive, very negative, or somewhere in between?

5. Is there anything you’d like to change about [Program Name] at your school? If so, what?
   
   Follow up question, as necessary:
   a. Why do you think this change would make the program better for middle or high school students?

6. How involved are students in helping plan [the program] or make it better? What sort of input do students have?

7. We are interested in helping schools more actively involve students in programs like [program]. What advice would you give to schools about doing this well?

8. What difference do you think it would make if students were more involved in planning or implementing [the program]?

9. What roles do you want to play in [Program Name] at your school?
   
   Follow up questions, as necessary:
   a. For example, would you like to be on a student leadership team?
   b. Meet with your school’s team to share your ideas?
   c. Be on a student panel?
   d. Acknowledge other students or staff in your building?
   e. Be a mentor to younger students?
   f. Help teach others about [Program Name] at your school?

Program name = the name of their schoolwide PBIS program

²Added as a follow-up question after Session 4
Data Analysis

- Full research team comprised of three TBSP staff, two faculty members, and one graduate student
- Followed a multistep, team-based approach to analyze data across six focus groups

Four coders went through structured process to create the list of codes
Research Questions

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Coding Process

1. Independently coded same two transcripts by identifying responses that were directly relevant to the research questions
2. Identified responses that were directly relevant to research questions
3. Used open coding to assign a code for each relevant response
4. Created in vivo codes, when possible, to reflect actual language
5. Met as a coding team to discuss preliminary codes and memos
6. Reached consensus on initial coding scheme and tentative definitions

Adopted the constant comparison method in which existing codes were frequently compared with previous uses to ensure consistency
Coding Process

7. Discussed initial codes, definitions, and coded documents with full research team and faculty provided feedback
8. Repeated process twice with two additional focus group transcripts added each time using existing codes or recommending new codes
9. Held meetings after the fourth and sixth transcripts were coded to reach agreement, rename existing codes, and revise description of codes
10. Coding questions were further revised and overarching research questions were sharpened
11. All transcripts were reviewed to finalize themes and definitions and to ensure all codes were appropriately assigned

Used team-based approach to strengthen the trustworthiness of our analysis
How do middle school students view PBIS at their school?
What do you think was the slice of PBIS that students noticed the most?
PBIS is all about rewards

View as a system to change behavior

Notice only a slice of PBIS

Generally view their program positively

Some students are indifferent to the program

View of PBIS

When asked about their school’s PBIS program, the students largely viewed it as a rewards system.

“It’s a great way to earn prizes for doing stuff that’s good.”
View of PBIS

Students see rewards as a way to motivate students to engage in more appropriate behavior. “It encourages students to work hard and put effort into their classes because they know something good will come out of it, eventually. So you just do something good, they know they’ll get something good.”

- PBIS is all about rewards
- View as a system to change behavior
- Notice only a slice of PBIS
- Generally view their program positively
- Some students are indifferent to the program
PBIS is all about rewards

View as a system to change behavior

Notice only a slice of PBIS

Generally view their program positively

Some students are indifferent to the program

View of PBIS

Students had a limited grasp of the overall framework and what PBIS was designed to accomplish.

“I mean, I guess it helps us stay in order, like do things the right way, like be respectful to our teachers and all that.”
PBIS is all about rewards

View as a system to change behavior

Notice only a slice of PBIS

Generally view their program positively

Some students are indifferent to the program

**View of PBIS**

“I think it’s good because it makes the students feel good, that they know that when they’re doing right, that they’ll have something to like remind them that they were doing good even if someone else wasn’t.”
PBIS is all about rewards

View as a system to change behavior

Notice only a slice of PBIS

Generally view their program positively

Some students are indifferent to the program

View of PBIS

“It’s in the middle because like I said, some people don’t really care about them. They don’t really care if they get PBIS tickets or not, but if you do care, it helps out a lot.”
What impact do students attribute to PBIS at their school?
How do students view the impact of PBIS at their school?
Areas of Impact

- Improves student behavior
- Improves academics
- Improves attitude towards school
- Improves school climate

“It makes us [want] to be better to deserve to get those [rewards], because if we do something good and we’re rewarded for it, then we know that was good and we should continue doing it.”
Areas of Impact

“When [students] act well, it keeps the teachers unstressed. Plus, it helps the environment so other students can learn . . . instead of waiting on the teachers to calm the other students down so they can start the lesson.”

“If the kids are better, they’ll make better grades and won’t be messing around in class. It causes them to make better grades.”

Improves student behavior

Improves academics

Improves attitude towards school

Improves school climate
“[Students] come in every day just hoping that they’ll have more points because they want those rewards, and it’s helping make everyone have a better attitude about going to school.”
Areas of Impact

- Improves student behavior
- Improves academics
- Improves attitude towards school
- Improves school climate

“The [PBIS] ticket and the [incentives] . . . give us a positive atmosphere to go to school in. I think it’s something to look forward to. And I like to think that it makes us happier to be going to school to be able to get prizes and stuff just for being a good person and doing what we’re supposed to do.”
Areas of Impact

- Encourages helping others
  
  “If we do something good . . . not only are we helping ourselves, but helping others.”
  
  Earning tickets is “a really fun way to encourage kids to [show] kindness.”

- Spurs competition

- Changes outside perceptions

- Absence of impact
Areas of Impact

Encourages helping others

Spurs competition

Changes outside perceptions

Absence of impact

“when you get a [PBIS] ticket or are rewarded by a teacher . . . it makes you feel good. And if you have a lot of tickets, you’re able to brag to your friends.”
Areas of Impact

- Encourages helping others
- Spurs competition
- Changes outside perceptions
- Absence of impact

“People, like, misjudge our school . . . I just think that with the PBIS program, that we can like, turn that around”
Areas of Impact

- Encourages helping others
- Spurs competition
- Changes outside perceptions
- Absence of impact

“Some people say good stuff about it, but most people say, ‘It’s fine.’ Most people are on that line where it’s like you’re not bad, but you’re not super good. It just doesn’t really affect you that much.”
How do they view the overall involvement of students at their school?
How do students perceive their overall involvement in PBIS at their school?
Overall Student Involvement

“...I feel like a lot of the students didn’t have much of a say in PBIS because whenever they mentioned it last year, I think it was kind of like a surprise to everybody . . . or I could just not know about some of the things.”

“...Any time one of us wants to discuss with the teacher in charge of PBIS incentives and stuff her door is always open. She's always ready for one of us to leave a suggestion. She even asks for us to go to her classroom if we ever want to tell her something that we could change or something that other people have told us to make it better.”
Our PBIS leaders and our student council have definitely tried to work with students and find new ways to make this more important to them and make them want to participate in PBIS more.”

“Overall Student Involvement

- Students have fairly limited involvement
- Student council is most popular way to be involved
- Students want to share their voice
- Involvement would improve student engagement
Overall Student Involvement

- Students have fairly limited involvement
- Student council is most popular way to be involved
- Students want to share their voice
- Involvement would improve student engagement

“I would want to be more of a leader, so I could help choose what we were going to do [for rewards], like help to see how we can get the students to have better grades and behavior.”
Overall Student Involvement

“I think that if the students were more involved then . . . everybody’s going to be into it.”

If students got to share their ideas about rewards, “kids would have like goals that are . . . about what they want. Like those they want to earn instead of like the pizzas.”

Students have fairly limited involvement

Student council is most popular way to be involved

Students want to share their voice

Involvement would improve student engagement
What recommendations do they have for improving the implementation of PBIS?
What were their top recommendations?
PBIS could be improved by...

Making system-wide changes

- Making system more accessible
- Making system more equitable
- Creating a customized system to match interest
- Including an observable discipline component
- Altering the plan yearly
- Including more rewards
- Incorporating technology

Adjusting ground rules for points and rewards

Increasing communication between staff and students

Increasing student involvement
PBIS could be improved by...

- Making system-wide changes

- Adjusting ground rules for points and rewards
  - Allowing points to carry over
  - Allowing all staff to award points
  - Removing daily point cap
  - Providing a way to store tickets
  - Including bonus points
  - Allowing students to award tickets
  - Sharing points with friends
  - Allowing the removal of points
  - Aligning points with behavior
  - Allowing students to buy way out of trouble

- Increasing communication between staff and students

- Increasing student involvement
Making system-wide changes

Adjusting ground rules for points and rewards

Increasing communication between staff and students

Increasing student involvement

PBIS could be improved by...

- Explaining the plan to students
- Explaining it takes time to change behavior
- Explaining it takes time to earn rewards
- Advertising rewards and events
- Building relationships with students
Making system-wide changes

Adjusting ground rules for points and rewards

Increasing communication between staff and students

Increasing student involvement

PBIS could be improved by...

- Polling students
- Inviting students to be on PBIS sub-committees
- Selectively gathering student input
- Planning more events
- Including opportunities for mentoring
Key Takeaways

Students:

- See PBIS as primarily their school’s acknowledgement system
- View PBIS as a system to change behavior
- Can understand the big picture, if we share it
- Are more engaged if they see their teachers are engaged
- Want to be more involved in the process
- Enjoy being asked their opinion
How does this inform our work?

- Emphasize relevant findings throughout our trainings
- Promote student involvement and provide resources
- Support schools in teaching the full Tier I plan to students
- Recommend schools hold their own focus groups
What strategies can you try?

- Assign staff to oversee student involvement or create sub-committees
- Start with existing student organizations or whole school
- Abandon assumptions that student involvement is only for high schools
Student Involvement: *Set the Tone*

- Prioritize working with students and provides opportunity for leadership
- Strengthen staff buy-in
- Facilitate regular positive interactions

(Good & Lindsay, 2015)
Student Involvement:

**Form Student Teams**

- Include a diverse group of students on subcommittees

- Assign faculty advisors to student workgroups for training and ongoing support

- Allow students to share ownership with adults for improved motivation and buy-in

(Flannery & Sugai, 2009)
Student Involvement: Gathering Input

- Survey or discuss with classes, student government, or various clubs/sports teams
- Ask students to help create questions, compile results, and action plan based on survey, focus groups, or class discussion data
- Commit to using student input so students feel heard and validated

(Fletcher, 2005)
How has the beginning of school been?

Scan this QR Code, to have your Student Voice heard!

If the code doesn’t work, visit this link: http://bit.ly/2o5SSEL

How would you grade Washington High School’s school spirit?

- A: 11%
- B: 16%
- C: 28%
- D: 45%

165 votes • Final results
3/2/16, 12:44 PM

SurveyMonkey®
Final Thoughts

“It was never really as much about the reward as it was about exemplifying behavior. So, I think that having student feedback would be something that would need to be thought about carefully . . . to just keep the message of [PBIS] clear and not to focus it too much on prizes and incentives. That’s definitely . . . [why] students lost interest because they feel it’s more about the prizes not the behavior.”
Questions?

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References


