



National Center  
on Response to  
Intervention

# Response to Intervention and School-wide Positive Behavior Support

**1. Question:** RTI in Michigan works well in school-wide Title I buildings. How do you see it working in targeted buildings? Targeted buildings must provide supplemental additional assistance to academically at risk students. Your webinar focused on the behavior approach, and in Michigan behavior, as you said, is often combined with early literacy intervention. That is where Title I targeted gets included. Most programs I have seen do not provide additional supplemental instruction in targeted programs. Do you have any thoughts or advice on how to advise these schools to continue their good practices and still use Title I under the “intent and purpose” of the law?

**Answer:** *The focus of Title I emphasizes additional supports for students who are not benefiting from a solid curriculum. These supports should be individualized, delivered quickly before significant deficits develop, and delivered with active monitoring of fidelity and impact. These supports should also be added to a strong foundation curriculum and used to compensate for weak primary intervention.*

*The federal government has documented that use of Title I funding for prevention (both behavioral and academic prevention) is appropriate. As such the use of the RtI logic within Title I contexts is very doable. A few years ago there was a lot of struggle around how to legally use Title I funding yet also do “best practice.” Many of those barriers have been overcome at the federal level... and now we need to overcome these same barriers at the state and district level.*

**2. Question:** Please provide some ideas on RTI for students that commit sexual acts.

**Answer:** *It is difficult to respond to this without more information about the age of the students, the type of sexual acts involved, the maintaining function, the context, and what has already been tried.*

*As a general comment, behaviors that place a student (or peers) at physical risk move instantly beyond the primary and secondary tiers of RtI support. A major strength of RtI is recognition that individualized interventions need to be considered as part of the overall system. So within an RtI framework (a) sexual acts would evoke an individualized, high intensity intervention that fits the specific context, and (b) the high intensity intervention would occur within a setting that had the primary prevention features that would make maintenance of behavior change more likely.*

**3. Question:** I have some folks in administration who have stated that they are not fans of PBS, although I really see that they are not clear on what it is. I have tried to get the district to look at AIMS-web for data collection, but have been told that is not an option. I am pushing for SWIS to be used, but they are looking at Pearson for data collection. Currently, I am creating data sheets for collection of behavioral data. The district also does not allow any fluency measures to be timed. They apparently had some negative experiences with DIBELS in the past.

I would appreciate any information you might share on measuring oral fluency and comprehension as well as data collection tools. The middle school principal has just come on board with PBS. They selected six principles. (I had hoped for three or four, but six is fine). Teachers are implementing their first school-wide intervention, and are all doing a lesson around defining the principles in their classroom and setting goals. The RTI team has created posters for what the behaviors look like in the hall, cafeteria, etc. He is curious about collecting data on ODRs, and currently looks at them twice a year and does it by hand.



U.S. Office of Special  
Education Programs



Any information related to middle school school-wide data collection and interventions will be appreciated. Folks really need to learn more about acknowledging students who display the appropriate behavior principles on a daily basis and not just at the beginning of the year. I remember your using SWIS in your presentations. Folks here aren't used to seeing school data graphed. We are at the very beginning stages of implementing RTI here, but I have seen so much progress in the last four months!

I would appreciate more information about universal screening at the middle school and high school level for behavior. There isn't a lot of information out there on universal screeners at the middle school level for behavior, so I created my own. I created a data collection sheet for each student whereby teachers collect data on attendance, tardies, ODRs, and grades in all classes for kids with one or more Fs. There has been concern around teachers using effective teaching strategies in their classrooms, so I started our first intervention for all students there. The school has six words that represent expectations on a few of the school walls. Parents and teachers chose those words two years ago, but they haven't been properly implemented.

I have started there and have set up for teachers to teach classroom expectations. Kids will help their teachers complete a chart that tells what each expectation looks like. Kids are also all going to do an activity around the expectations in the form of "New Year's Resolutions." They will rate themselves (1–5) where they stand in each area, and set a goal to meet in areas that need an improvement. They will have a section of their notebook to document how they are doing, what needs to change, and next steps once a month. Teachers will monitor kids' comments in their notebook and bring up kids at their team meetings who they are concerned about. Teachers will talk about interventions they can all do to support those kids. For example, do they need another intervention around tardies?

The data will lead their decisions. After one month of consistent intervention, those kids whose data show they have not improved will be referred to the SAT for more intensive intervention ideas to be designed and implemented. This is what I have set up as a universal screener for behavior that is school-wide. Any thoughts?

**Answer:** *You are busy... and you ask many excellent questions. Let me try to sort out the different questions and offer at least initial responses.*

*1. How does data collection fit with RTI applied at both behavioral and academic outcomes?*

*On at least a monthly basis you want all staff in a school to be able to answer two questions: (a) are we doing what we said we would do (e.g., intervention) and (b) is what we are doing benefiting students.*

*Within an RTI framework we are taught that answering these questions requires (a) a fidelity measure (reading, math, behavior), (b) a universal screening measure used at least 2–3 times a year, and (c) progress monitoring measures to determine if interventions are working.*

*Within PBIS we use three measures of fidelity (team implementation checklist, School-wide Evaluation Tool, and Benchmarks of Quality) to assess if PBIS is in place in a school. The specific measure that a school selects depends on where a school is in the process of implementation, but the key message is that at any time the administrator, team and district can identify if a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity. Similar measures (e.g., PET) are available for early literacy measurement.*

*For Universal Screening we use the SSBD for elementary schools (see work of Lucille Eber in Illinois), but basically rely on ODRs and teacher reports at middle and high school. If 2–3 times a year your teachers nominate students who engage in behavior that is a barrier to their social and/or academic achievement you will identify most kids needing early support.*

*Using ODRs as a progress monitoring index is effective. Our research suggests that a student with more than 2 major ODRs should be receiving some level of additional support. Once they start receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 support you need more detailed data. Look on the [www.swis.org](http://www.swis.org) website and click on the CICO tab. Look at the reports in that file as an example of the kind of data we would expect for more intensive progress monitoring. See also work by Dr. Doug Cheney (University of Washington), who has a very effective progress monitoring system that is web based.*

## 2. School team use of graphs

*There are several projects currently underway documenting that when typical school teams use real data in graphic form for identification of problems, and development of problem solutions they are more effective and more efficient (see work by Steve Newton and Bob Algozzine in North Carolina). We have people in schools who are very capable of using data, but we simply have never given them the right information, in the right format, at the right time needed for decision-making. The key is that it is not enough to simply provide data...the data must be trustworthy, and the team needs the training to use data-based indicators to do effective problem solving.*

## 3. Your universal screening plan

*I like the idea of asking the teachers regularly to nominate students. Consider using the quick questions from the Stage 2 SSBD as another step in the process, but what you are doing seems fine. There are not clearly reasonable strategies for middle school and high school.*

**4. Question:** Are there samples of clear consequences for a pre-K setting? Do you modify for children with special needs or are the expectations the same?

**Answer:** *The answer is "absolutely." If you go to the [pbis.org](http://pbis.org) website, we have examples of establishing behavior support systems for preschool, for kindergarten, for elementary, for middle school, and for high school.*

*Your question is a beautiful one because it emphasizes the need to ensure that the behavioral expectations be tied to the developmental level of the kids. Similarly, the consequences for inappropriate behavior need to be tied to the developmental level of the students.*

*So both in terms of defining behavioral expectations and defining a continuum for consequences, by going to [pbis.org](http://pbis.org), you can find a matrix and table of strategies that have been used.*

**5. Question:** Have randomized control trials been conducted (or are any underway) that are looking at the impact of PBIS on student outcomes such as statewide standardized tests?

**Answer:** *The answer is yes. There are randomized control trials that have been done in Illinois, Hawaii, Maryland, and Arizona. Ron Nelson has conducted randomized control trials using the development of school-wide systems.*

*Catherine Bradshaw has done three different studies within a randomized control trial framework documenting both the effectiveness of school-wide positive behavior support and preliminary data documenting not only the improvement in social behavior, but the improvement in the quality of the organization as a place to work.*

*We have just published a randomized control trial again documenting (1) that school-wide positive behavior support can be implemented, (2) that it's related to reduction in problem behavior and improved school safety, and (3) preliminary but not definitive data in elementary schools that show that when you create coherent social environments, they actually are related to improved social or improved academic outcomes.*

**6. Question:** What does instruction in behavioral expectations at the high school level look like?

**Answer:** *High school is an area that we've been particularly focused on. We worked with about 1,000 high schools throughout the country. We just pulled together a group of the high schools in the country that*

have been most successful at implementing school-wide positive behavior support. They have described what they've done.

We've done a synthesis of their core features, and a monograph on implementation of school-wide behavior support at the high school level will be uploaded in approximately four weeks.

The short answer is instruction of behavioral expectations at the high school level always involves the students being actively engaged and typically involves an orientation, not a training, that is done by other students and that includes how to be successful academically.

Keep in mind that in high school, 72% of the problem behaviors come from the freshmen and sophomores. The reason for that is not that the older kids suddenly get socially together. It's that you lose the heavy hitters by the middle of sophomore year. So in part, use the well-behaved juniors and seniors as the models and mentors for the other students.

**7. Question:** What triggers should a high school use to help establish tier 2 interventions for programs such as tutoring?

**Answer:** We have been learning a lot about high school intervention of PBIS in the past several years. The most common problem behaviors in high school are tardy and skipping. The most common grade levels are 9 and 10. By the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, most of the heavy hitters are gone.

Jessica Swain-Bradway, among others, is advocating use of (a) teacher nomination, (b) academic risk, and (c) attendance/behavior problems as triggers for Tier 2 interventions. What she also recommends is the linking of behavioral and academic supports. Her program, which combines Academic Seminar (study skills/ class support) with Check-in Check-out, has been functional related to (a) improved academic engagement, (b) retention in school, and (c) improved grades. (You can download the intervention manual she uses from [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org).)

We have a long way to go as we learn more about use of SWPBS and RtI at the high school level. Look for a High School Monograph to be released online at [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org) by March 15.

**8. Question:** Can you talk more about what behavioral databases are available and their reliability and validity?

**Answer:** If we really believe in RTI, part of what is going to be essential is that we give people data that they can actively use for decision-making. Decision-making relies on the information being credible, the information being available at the right time, and the information being in a format that's usable by the right people.

Data systems for keeping track of behavioral data are used by administrators, they're used by school teams, and they're used by student assistance teams working with individual kids.

We actually have done systematic assessment of office discipline referrals and the extent to which office discipline referrals can be used as a credible forum. We get two messages. Message number one is that the traditional systems that are available in schools are categorically inaccurate. Message number two is if a school goes through the process of adopting a program that uses operationally-defined, mutually-exclusive, and exhaustive behavioral categories, teachers and staff can in fact collect and use data that is valid and reliable.

You can take a look at the validity and reliability data for the SWIS system on the [pbis.org](http://pbis.org) website citations. There's nothing that is more valid and reliable than direct observation. There are also a number of standardized assessments, but standardized assessments are too often too expensive.

If we're going to build systems that work, we will be using systems that are automated in which people are collecting and using data on a regular basis inside the school.

An excellent question. The key thing is that technology is in fact giving us access to behavioral databases that work.

**9. Question:** How do you define a major office referral? We would like to gather this data for our school district.

**Answer:** *The short answer is I recommend that you go to either the pbis.org website or the swis.org website. You can download the office discipline referral definitions.*

*A major referral is actually a behavioral infraction, as defined by the federal government, or a behavior that places a barrier to the social or academic development of either that student or the students around him or her.*

*It's usual things like physical aggression, verbal aggression, harassment—those sorts of variables. Contrast that with a minor event that is rapidly resolved. You can look at the operational definitions and see how they fit your school.*

**10. Question:** Can you speak to some of the research on PBIS/RTI and disproportionality, culturally responsive practice? How is it being evaluated?

**Answer:** *We are extremely concerned about the cultural responsiveness of discipline systems in the US, and about the role that PBIS may play. We have been fortunate to have significant guidance from the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Indiana Civil Rights Commission. We also have been working closely with Russ Skiba who is a national expert on racial disproportionality. A major paper summarizing patterns of disproportionality in ODRs and Administrative Decisions with Dr. Skiba as first author is now "in press." Consider writing to him for a pre-publication copy of the paper.*

*I also encourage you to look at research by Dr. Skiba and Dr. Gwen Cartledge. They are moving beyond simple finger pointing, and are among the first to really suggest practical steps to improve the problem of disproportionality.*

*One quick note: In virtually all cases, among the first steps to address this challenge is to use a regular data system that allows at least monthly comparison of the allocation of office referrals by ethnicity compared to enrollment by race/ethnicity. To look at one example of how this can be done, go to the [www.swis.org](http://www.swis.org) website, and then go into the demo site and examine the "ethnicity report."*

*We all have a lot to learn about this challenge.*

**11. Question:** The "consistent consequences" has always held some trouble. For example, some consequences, such as suspension, are rewarding for some students but aversive for others. Any thoughts on this issue? It's one we struggle with. Consequences may be rewarding for some. What if being consistent is rewarding for some students?

**Answer:** *I've got to say simply your recognition that consequences for problem behavior can actually make the behavior worse places you in the top 10% of people who are dealing with these issues. It is perfectly worded and exactly right.*

*How many times have you seen in high school, for example, a student who was brought into the administrative office for skipping and being tardy, and was suspended? That's an excellent example of a consequence actually being a reward.*

*The short answer is any systematic list of consequences will have multiple tiers. It will be based on the presumed behavioral function of the problem behavior. There will be discretion both at the teacher level and at the administrator level. What won't be a discretion is the acknowledgement by all kids that this behavior is unacceptable.*

*Now we actually have multiple tactics for dealing with behavior that's tension and maintain versus behavior that's escape and maintain. Several articles recently published by Dr. Kent McIntosh give elegant examples of how to deal with some of those sorts of issues.*

*Excellent question. Actually, there's a lot of literature focused on this. We do much more with this when you get into the yellow and the red levels of intensity.*

**12. Question:** Who would be effective coaches for beginning implementation of RTI/PBIS?

**Answer:** *Coaching is a critical role for both high fidelity of implementation and sustained use of SWPBS. Coaches need to be (a) available at least monthly to be at team meetings, (b) knowledgeable about the core intervention (e.g. SWPBS, early literacy), (c) able to work with school teams, (d) able to help teams collect and use data.*

*Typically we see people in roles like (a) school psychologist, (b) school counselor, (c) social worker, (d) special educator, (e) behavior specialist as successful coaches. What is less likely to work is when the “coach” has major teaching/administration tasks that prevent him or her from working across schools with the level of contact the schools need.*

*It may be helpful for you to look at the “Implementation Briefs” written by Dean Fixsen and Karen Blase... co-directors of the OSEP TA-Center on scaling up... see their work at [www.scalingup.org](http://www.scalingup.org)*

**13. Question:** Is parental involvement considered critical or key to achieving desired outcomes?

**Answer:** *We are big fans of family involvement in schools, and within PBIS. We are working closely with Dr. Tom Dishion who is teaching us more about family support systems, and with several state programs that actively encourage family involvement.*

*The logic for investing in family involvement is compelling. The data, however, are not currently available. We encourage family involvement in SWPBS but do not require it. Schools have made major improvements in the school social culture without high investment in family engagement...so it may be an overstatement to say family involvement is “crucial.” Our belief is that family engagement will improve all other elements of the social culture of a school, but that comes from practical experience, not compelling research results. As a field we need more formal research on the process and impact for building stronger family involvement.*

## National Center on Response to Intervention

If you have comments and questions about this workgroup and its activities, please visit our website [www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org) or contact The National Center on Response to Intervention at [rticenter@air.org](mailto:rticenter@air.org).

This report was produced under U.S. Department of Education Cooperative Agreement #H326E070004 with the American Institutes for Research. Grace Zamora Durán and Tina Diamond served as the project officers. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred.

1000 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Washington, DC 20007  
Ph: 877-RTI-4ALL | TTY: 877-334-3499 | Fax: 202-403-5001

