

Data-driven team is key to sustaining positive behavior framework in schools

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Kent McIntosh, a professor in the Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences at the University of Oregon, says a dedicated team that relies on data-driven information is the No. 1 key to implementing School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The framework aims at helping teachers improve student behaviors through teaching. Credit: University of Oregon

A new study finds that a dedicated team that makes decisions based on data is crucial for launching and sustaining a framework designed at the University of Oregon in the early 1990s to prevent and reduce behavioral

problems in the nation's schools.

The study, published in the January issue of the *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, involved a comprehensive survey of 257 school team members or school district personnel involved in the implementation of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) at 234 schools in 14 states.

"One of the really interesting outcomes of this study is that school personnel perceive principal support as the most important factor in sustainability," said lead author Kent McIntosh, a professor in the Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences at the University of Oregon. "Although principal support is key, when we factored in other aspects of their implementation, having an effective school-based team that uses data for decision making was even more critical to sustainability. Although it's great to have the support of a strong administrator, relying on one person to sustain a practice is a bad strategy for actual sustainability."

SWPBIS, which centers on teaching strategies, is an approach rather than a program, McIntosh said. "It is a framework—an umbrella under which you can fit all kinds of behavioral support strategies and practices."

George Sugai of the University of Connecticut and the UO's Robert Horner developed the framework in the early 1990s. At the time, Sugai was a faculty member in the UO College of Education with Horner. Sugai and Horner, a professor of [special education](#), are co-leaders of the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, a multi-institutional organization funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

SWPBIS is now in 20,011 schools across the United States. Schools in

Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway also have adopted it. Schools implementing the framework have seen dramatic reductions in discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions.

Implementation of SWPBIS initially involved trained teams entering schools, but as the framework expanded, its introduction is now done locally, "on a grassroots level," McIntosh said. SWPBIS is supported by national and regional assistance centers that provide materials and access to a growing database on student behaviors based on reports from schools across the nation. By tapping such data, teaching strategies can be adjusted to recapture students' attention, establish expectations and reduce opportunities for misbehavior.

For the study, McIntosh said, participants initially had rated a long list of attributes as vitally important for the successful implementation of SWPBIS. So the study team, which included researchers at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and the University of Texas at El Paso, drilled deeper to identify components that encourage the ongoing use of the framework.

Initial buy-in by a leading administrator is important, especially when the leader makes it clear that SWPBIS is a priority and then attends team meetings. However, McIntosh said, the importance of an implementation team—with its members representing all interests of the school involved—emerged as the most significant factor driving sustainability.

"It's not a completely contrasting situation," he said. "We found that both are important, and that if you had a committed administrator and a well-functioning school team that used school-discipline data for decision-making, then you were more likely to sustain and keep it going. If you had to choose one or the other, a well-functioning team was actually more important."

Strong teams, McIntosh said, are able to compensate in instances of less administrator support, overly dominating administrators and for the turnover of top administrators. Building [sustainability](#), in turn, helps schools stay focused on SWPBIS.

McIntosh described the study's findings and ongoing efforts to monitor SWPBIS implementation in a keynote address Jan. 23 at the Illinois PBIS Network Winter Leadership Conference. Illinois is the leading adopter of SWPBIS. McIntosh also will speak at the 12th Annual Northwest PBIS Conference, Feb. 26-28, in Portland, Ore., on the same topic and about a new initiative to use SWPBIS to address racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline practices.

"Researchers at the University of Oregon are developing science-based applications that yield effective prevention and intervention strategies," said Kimberly Andrews Espy, vice president for research and innovation and dean of the UO Graduate School. "This research by Dr. McIntosh and his team examining the various implementation methods of school districts adopting the SWPBIS intervention framework pioneered at the UO has the potential to improve student social behavior and academic performance by optimizing educational reform efforts."

Provided by University of Oregon

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