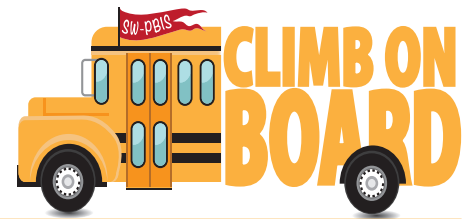


Getting Preschool Classrooms on Board with School-Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (SW-PBIS)



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In the last decade there has been tremendous growth in the number of young children enrolled in publicly funded preschool programs with 41.5 percent of 4-year-olds and 14.5 percent of 3-year-olds served in publicly funded preschool, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, Brown, & Horowitz, 2015). While many of these services are provided within community early care and education programs, increasingly preschool classrooms are being located on school campuses.

The location of preschool classrooms on the elementary school campus offers a wonderful opportunity for providing high quality early education programs and a seamless transition to kindergarten. However, the inclusion of preschool classrooms can pose challenges for school-wide initiatives. In this brief, we discuss some of the issues related to implementing School-Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (SW-PBIS) and offer some tips for achieving the successful inclusion of preschool classrooms in your efforts.

Commonly encountered issues:

Issues that might occur related to the inclusion of preschool classrooms in your school-wide initiative are:

- Teachers in the preschool classroom might not understand the application of SW-PBIS to their context. Teachers might regard SW-PBIS as being a school-wide discipline approach that is more relevant to older children.
- Teachers in the preschool classroom generally do not use token systems to acknowledge child engagement in expectations and therefore might not understand how they can participate in the school-wide initiative. Young children often do not have the symbolic representation skills or social development to understand a token economy and are not motivated by reinforcers that are not immediate.
- Teachers of young children expect that they will encounter child challenging behavior in their classrooms as young children are early in their social development and their ability to be members of a social group, express emotions appropriately, and engage in social problem solving. The development of discipline referral tracking systems related to identifying common rule violations and uniform responses is not applicable to the preschool classroom.
- Teachers in the preschool classroom might raise objections to being included in the use of common SW-PBIS data decision-making tools as they do not offer considerations for the unique context of the early childhood classroom. For example, teachers might not be using the school-wide discipline system in their classroom and might have children who are unable to recite expectations due to their limited communication or cognitive development.
- School faculty and staff might not have adequate experience with preschool children to make modifications to the SW initiative and therefore overlook the opportunity to teach and reinforce social skills and appropriately address challenging behavior.



Strategies for inclusion:

The success of School-Wide PBIS is reliant on the buy-in of all school staff and impacting outcomes for *ALL* students. Thus, it is important that the concerns of teachers of preschool children are addressed and that they become part of your initiative. The following strategies can be used to ensure that your SW approach considers the unique context and concerns of the preschool classroom.

- **Provide opportunities for input and teaming** – Because the preschool classroom serves a population that has unique needs and the evidence-based practices used to promote child outcomes has a research literature that might differ from K-5 classrooms, it is important to acknowledge these differences. We suggest ensuring that preschool classrooms are represented with a designated seat on the school leadership team. This will provide an opportunity for all team members to learn about the curriculum provided in the preschool classroom and the concerns of teachers of young children. Moreover, collaborative teaming will allow the preschool teacher to fully understand the school-wide approach.



- **Acknowledge differences** – An important concept of PBIS is that interventions should be contextually and culturally appropriate (Singer & Wang, 2009; Sugai, O’Keefe, & Fallon, 2012). The concerns about the unique needs and capacities of young children and the design of the early childhood curriculum that might be expressed by the preschool teachers are authentic and valid. It will be important to acknowledge these differences and make adjustments. For example, the preschool classroom might not participate in the token system in the same manner as the upper grade classrooms. However, preschool teachers who encounter students in the upper grades in general school settings (e.g., cafeteria, bus loading zone, playground) must be knowledgeable about the school-wide discipline system and how to respond to students.
- **Adapt participation expectations when developmentally appropriate** – The concept of developmental appropriateness is foundational to early education. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) refers to the delivery of intentional instruction that acknowledges the importance of providing experiences to children that are matched to their developmental characteristics and responsive to each child as an individual. In addition, DAP requires that early educators considers a child’s cultural, social, and family context in the design of the learning environment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Allow the preschool teachers to identify how they might meet the intent of the school-wide systems without violating concerns they might have about developmental appropriateness. For example, rather than using the token system for individual acknowledgement, the preschool classroom might use the acknowledgement system for whole class celebrations of their effort to engage in expectations. Similarly, because young children will not be sent to the office for rule violations, the expectation to participate in an Office Discipline Referral system should not be applied to preschool classrooms.
- **Provide training and support for classroom implementation** – The relationship between the teacher and the child is of primary importance in a high quality early education classroom. Young children will not be in general school environments without the supervision of their teachers and will look to their teachers for guidance, support, and instruction. Thus, it is the teacher who is most influential in promoting the child’s social emotional skills and addressing challenging behavior. This means that teachers must be well-trained in the evidence-based

practices to use to promote social and emotional competence, prevent behavior issues, and intervene with challenging behavior. Similarly to how K-12 teachers are trained and coached on PBIS procedures, training and coaching should be provided to preschool teachers on the specific practices that might be used within the early childhood classroom to teach social emotional skills and address challenging behavior. There are numerous resources and materials that are aligned with PBIS and have research support for strengthening the practice of preschool teachers (see www.challengingbehavior.org and <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>).



- **Use assessments that are contextually appropriate and valid for the preschool classroom** – In the selection of tools and measures to use for data based decision-making in your school-wide initiative, consider the use of tools that have been developed specifically for preschool classrooms or making adjustments to tools for the consideration of early educators. For example, the leadership team might make adjustments to scoring criteria of the *PBIS Team Implementation Checklist* (Sugai, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, Rossetto & Dickey, 2014) when early childhood classrooms are not using tangible rewards or applying major and minor rules and procedures. Similarly there may be items on the *School-Wide Benchmarks of Quality* (Kincaid, Childs, & George, 2010) that will not apply to preschool classrooms (e.g., systems of rewards, expectations for the use of tangible rewards, use of Office Discipline procedures). Tools that have been developed for use in the preschool classroom include the *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™)* (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014), the *Preschool-Wide Evaluation Tool (PreSET™)* (Steed & Pomerleau, 2012), the *Early Childhood Program-Wide PBS Benchmarks of Quality* (Fox, Hemmeter, & Jack, 2010) and the *Behavior Incident Recording System* (Fox, Binder, Liso, & Duda, 2010). More information on tools designed for use in the preschool classroom may be found on www.challengingbehavior.org.

The inclusion of preschool classroom in the SW-PBIS process should not be considered a separate initiative but rather an expansion of the ongoing implementation process. When school teams commit to including ALL students in the SW-PBIS initiative, they will benefit from greater academic, social, and emotional outcomes as well as a more cohesive and positive school climate.

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