Alignment of the PBIS Framework and School-based Suicide Prevention

Executive Guidance for School Leaders Brief #4 May 2018

Section 1:

How does the PBIS framework and School-based Suicide Prevention efforts align?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a framework for decision-making and organizational change that supports the installation of evidence-based, research-validated prevention and intervention strategies using a three-tiered approach to improving behavioral and learning outcomes for students. Universal prevention strategies (Tier 1) are evidence-based approaches applied consistently and systematically across the school population. These strategies aim to instruct all students in appropriate behaviors and skills to promote positive school climate and optimize learning. Targeted Group (Tier 2) prevention strategies focus on smaller groups of students whose behaviors are not sufficiently responsive to Tier 1 approaches. Tier 2 interventions are delivered to small groups of students as a "standard protocol" or evidence-based curriculum, or as a program designed to build specific skills. Individual-intensive strategies (Tier 3) are highly specialized interventions delivered to individual students with high risk behaviors. Typically, between one to seven percent of a school's population will require specialized individual supports.

PBIS emphasizes operationally defined and valued outcomes for students, which are linked to the school's annual improvement objectives and aggregated through data collection systems. Leadership teams at the school- and district-level oversee the implementation of PBIS, including the selection of valued outcomes, monitoring of school-level data and implementation of universal and targeted strategies. The PBIS leadership team works in collaboration with other school-level teams, including School Safety Teams, Student Assistance Program (SAP) Teams and Instructional Support Teams, to minimize duplicity and streamline efforts.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2012), school-based suicide prevention efforts should address the following six components: 1) protocols for helping students at risk of suicide, 2) protocols for responding to student death (i.e., postvention), 3) staff education training, 4) parent education, 5) student education, and 6) screening. Act 71, passed in Pennsylvania in July of 2014, aligns with SAMHSA's model and requires schools to establish policies and procedures for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Under Act 71, schools must also provide four hours of training to educators in grades 6-12 every five years, as well as provide suicide awareness and prevention education to students.

Current best practices in school-based suicide prevention address the components of SAMHSA's model, as well as the requirements of Act 71. However, suicide prevention efforts in schools have historically been more targeted and reactive, in that they have either focused on identifying and intervening with youth that are already at risk of suicide or have been implemented in response to a student death by suicide. While these targeted efforts are important, the field of suicide prevention has begun to emphasize "upstream approaches" that aim to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors prior to the onset of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. From this perspective, schools that implement a broad range of preventive programs addressing student social, emotional, and behavioral wellness and improved school climate may consider these efforts part of a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention.

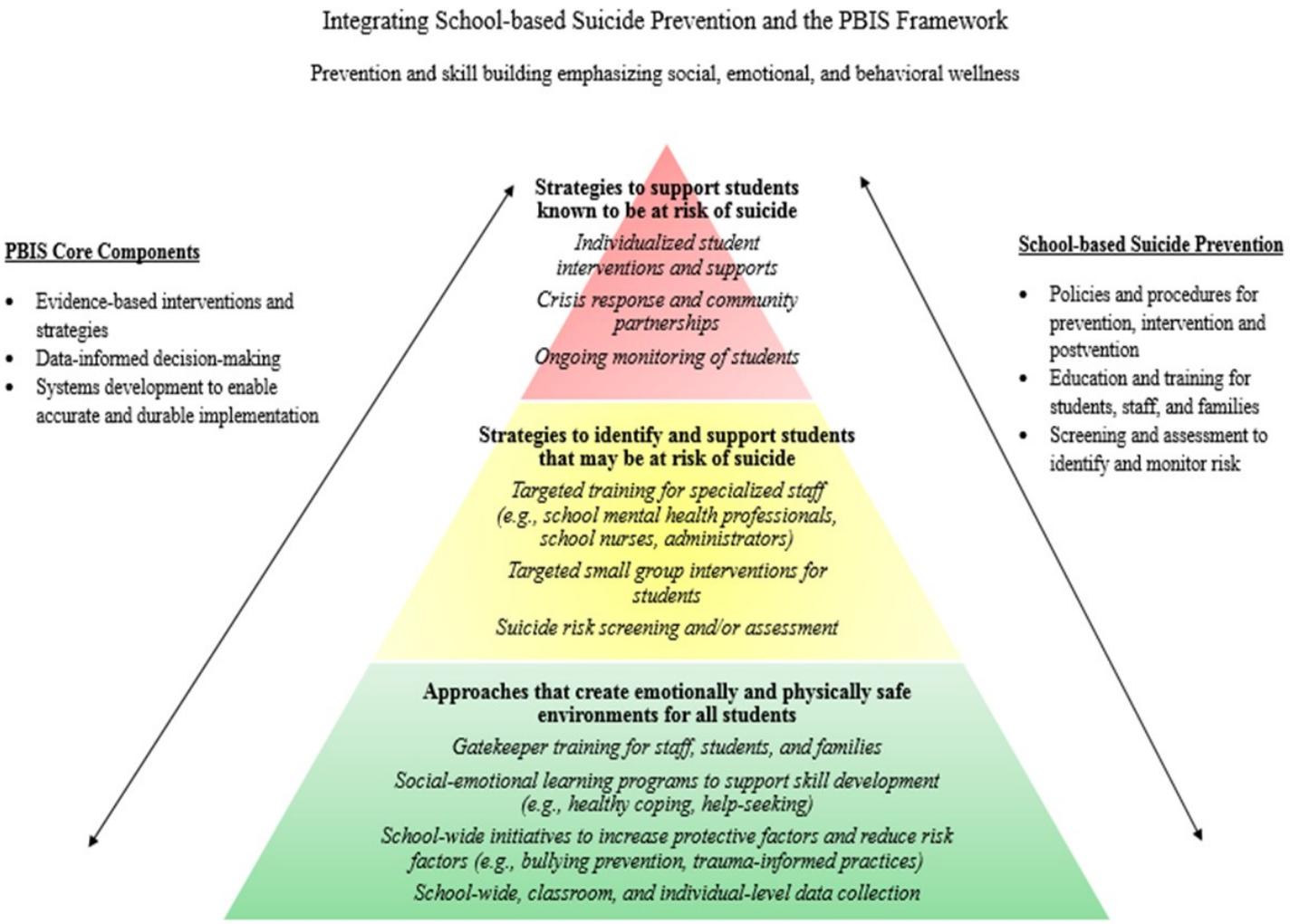
In This Issue

- Alignment of the PBIS Framework and Suicide Prevention
- A continuum of practice: PBIS and Suicide Prevention
- What do leaders need to know when aligning activities

Section 2:

How does application of the PBIS framework align with School-based Suicide Prevention?

With the field of youth suicide prevention now focusing more broadly on upstream approaches in addition to more targeted approaches to identifying and intervening with youth at risk, it is logical to consider these efforts through a multi-tiered lens. Thus, the conceptual alignment between the PBIS framework and school-based suicide prevention is best understood within the context of a multi-tiered framework, as well as in their overlapping goals and strategies. The following visual portrays how suicide prevention activities may be situated across the three tiers of the PBIS framework.



The PBIS framework and comprehensive school-based suicide prevention efforts share various overlapping goals and strategies across the three tiers that create a continuum of practices. These practices are best understood within the following categories: (1) Foundational Elements and Readiness, (2) Education and Training, and (3) Assessment and Evaluation. The alignment between the PBIS framework and school-based suicide prevention as situated within each of these three categories is further described below, while the accompanying tables reflect common best practices associated with each category.

I. Foundational Elements and Readiness

The PBIS framework and school-based suicide prevention efforts rely on common foundational elements that create a readiness for the cultural shift that supports effective implementation of these initiatives. School leadership must first acknowledge that the needs of the whole child include social, emotional, and behavioral wellness and that there is a well-established relationship between mental health and academic achievement in leading to positive student outcomes (Taylor et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011). Conceptual buy-in must be accompanied by systems development to

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address logistical barriers (e.g., funding, time, personnel) to establish readiness. Throughout implementation, both of these approaches also prioritize school and community efforts to overcome stigma and misperceptions about student behavior, mental health, and suicide.

Foundational Elements and Readiness	
PBIS Framework	**School-based Suicide Prevention**
• Administration and staff buy-in and capacity building • Establish personnel roles and teaming structures • Establish outcomes measures and data collection tools • Identify evidence-based and culturally-relevant practices (e.g., resource mapping)	• Development of school or district-wide suicide prevention policies and procedures, which according to Pennsylvania's Act 71, should include • Protocols for staff and student education • Methods of prevention, including early identification and referral • Methods of intervention to identify and intervene with youth at risk • Methods of response (i.e., postvention) to student attempt or death by suicide • Reporting and data collection procedures • Recommended resources

II. Education and Training

Effective implementation of the PBIS framework and school-based suicide prevention efforts is reliant on education and training of students and staff, as well as the broader community. At the universal level, both initiatives emphasize prevention and skill-building for all students in the areas of social, emotional, and behavioral wellness, as well as mental health and suicide prevention awareness. Professional development should occur for all staff to develop awareness, knowledge, and skills (e.g., mental health literacy, principles of behavior), as well as to understand their role within school-wide systems and procedures. At the secondary and tertiary levels, students at risk of behavioral health problems and/or suicide, and students known to be at risk of suicide, should receive interventions to develop self-advocacy, help-seeking, and positive coping strategies. Key staff members should receive targeted training to support the delivery of interventions, the assessment of students, and data collection across the three tiers.

Education and Training		
Tier	**PBIS Framework**	**School-based Suicide Prevention**
Universal (Tier1)	• Define and teach expectations • Build rapport • Trauma-informed practices emphasizing - Safety - Empowerment - Collaboration - Trustworthiness - Choice - Strengths-based - Cultural, historical and gender responsive • Establishment of school-wide rules with consequence systems that emphasize proactive reinforcement of desired behaviors	• Gatekeeper training for students and all staff on how to identify, respond, and refer an at-risk student • Social-emotional learning curricula to develop protective factors and prevent risk factors • Mental health/suicide awareness and prevention programs and campaigns
Targeted/ Indicated (Tiers 2/3)	• Small group or individualized interventions for students demonstrating at-risk or high-risk behaviors • Targeted training for staff to deliver interventions and data collection procedures related to targeted interventions • Staff education on effective collaboration with youth, family and community members	• Small group/individualized school-based interventions for students with risk factors for suicide (e.g., trauma, depression, anxiety) or at known risk of suicide • Community-based treatment for students at high-risk of suicide • Training for key staff (e.g. school mental health professionals) on - small-group/individualized interventions for students with behavioral health needs and/or those that may be at risk of suicide - crisis intervention and response - school reentry/ongoing monitoring after hospitalization postvention

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III. Assessment and Evaluation

Data-driven decision-making using school-wide, classroom, and individual-level indicators is a pivotal aspect of effective PBIS implementation. The systematic use of data (i.e., school climate data, attendance, office discipline referrals, universal screening data, etc.) to determine the needs and gaps provides the leadership team with comprehensive information to form action plans to meet desired student outcomes. Effective school-based suicide prevention is also reliant upon data collection, typically through targeted screening and/or assessment at the individual level when a student presents with suicidal thoughts or behaviors or returns to school after hospitalization. However, in line with "upstream" approaches, school-based suicide prevention efforts may consider implementing universal screening (e.g., social-emotional needs, behavioral health) and examining other data sources commonly used for decision-making within the PBIS framework to proactively identify students at risk that should receive individual or group interventions. Additionally, monitoring school-wide and classroom universal interventions that aim to reduce risk factors (e.g., bullying) and enhance protective factors (e.g., school climate) should also be considered part of a school's comprehensive suicide prevention efforts. Ongoing program evaluation (e.g., intervention effectiveness, team functioning, crisis response) and individual progress monitoring should also occur to ensure efficient, accurate, and durable implementation of these efforts.

Assessment and Evaluation		
Tier	**PBIS Framework**	**School-based Suicide Prevention**
Universal (Tier1)	• Establishment of school-wide leadership team to evaluate the impact of universal strategies on student, classroom, and school-wide outcomes • Utilization of multiple data sources • Monitoring of the fidelity of implementation • Dissemination and acknowledgement of outcomes and accomplishments	• Universal social, emotional, and behavioral screening • Universal suicide and/or behavioral health screening
Targeted/ Indicated (Tiers 2/3)	• Data collection to continuously monitor individual student progress toward intended outcomes (i.e., progress monitoring) • Individualized student-driven decision-making related to interventions (e.g., altering type, frequency, intensity, or duration)	• Indicated suicide screening and risk assessment to appropriately identify youth with suicidal thoughts and/or behaviors • Ongoing monitoring of suicidal thoughts and/or behaviors for students known to be at risk of suicide • Monitoring and evaluation of individualized interventions (e.g., safety plans) for effectiveness

Section 3:

What do school leaders need to consider when aligning activities associated with the PBIS Framework and School-based Suicide Prevention, Including Pennsylvania's Act 71?

A critical first step in school-based suicide prevention and requirement under Pennsylvania's Act 71 is for schools to develop suicide awareness and prevention policies, and to disseminate this information to school staff and families. Schools should further develop specific procedures to outline implementation of their policy. Given that PBIS and school-based suicide prevention efforts share the goal of supporting student social, emotional, and behavioral wellness, administrators should strongly consider the extent to which the resources allocated to each of these initiatives may be aligned. These resources may take the form of staff time or funding to organize, develop and/or implement training programs for staff and students that follow best practice guidelines in suicide prevention, meet the requirements of Act 71, and situate across the three tiers of the PBIS framework. Screening tools that support early identification and referral of students at risk, and that provide data for team-based decision-making around individual student needs warrant careful consideration. Administrators may also want to consider the alignment, and where feasible, integration of various teaming structures (e.g., PBIS teams, SAP teams, crisis response teams) and develop guidelines with regard to personnel, function, and data use across these teams.

Educating and training staff, students, families, and relevant community partners is essential to facilitate stakeholder buy-in and ensure understanding of the PBIS framework. Furthermore, comprehensive training efforts help to establish a broad safety net and continuum of supports for school-based suicide prevention efforts across the multi-tiered framework. Training should reflect both the philosophical foundation of PBIS and the underlying principles associated with the promotion of social, emotional, and behavioral wellness and suicide preven-

tion, as well as the specific knowledge and skill sets required for implementation of both initiatives. Differentiation of both curriculum and instructional approach to professional development should occur, thereby avoiding a "one size fits all" approach.

The data system utilized to support implementation of the PBIS framework already incorporates metrics relevant to school-based suicide prevention (e.g., school climate, attendance, universal screening). To further integrate suicide prevention efforts with PBIS, additional data sources may be considered, such as the use of universal or targeted suicide and/or behavioral health screening data, as well as progress monitoring data for youth receiving small group or individualized interventions to address suicide risk or other behavioral health needs. Fidelity measures associated with the PBIS framework (e.g., Tiered Fidelity Instrument) should continue to be employed with the integration of outcome measures associated with staff gatekeeper trainings and student education programs. Furthermore, program evaluation to assess efficacy of team functioning (e.g., PBIS teams, crisis response teams), as well as overall school or district-wide outcomes as related to these integrated efforts may help to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Section 4:

Where to find more information on the PBIS Framework, Suicide Prevention, and Act 71.

National Resources

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports - Provides systems information on PBIS for educators, families, community members, as well as additional resources including training, research, and evaluation tools. www.pbis.org

Association for Positive Behavior Support - Provides research-based strategies to increase quality of life and decrease problem behavior in home, school, and community settings. http://www.apbs.org/

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) - Provides information and resources for a wide range of behavioral health issues, including suicide prevention; key resources include Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools. https://www.samhsa.gov/suicide-prevention

Suicide Prevention Resource Center - Provides technical assistance, training, and materials to increase knowledge of suicide prevention. http://www.sprc.org/

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Tony Evers, State Superintendent (n.d.).
Using Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) to Help Schools Become More Trauma-Sensitive. Accessed 6-12-17 from https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/trauma/pbis.

Pennsylvania Resources

Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PA PBS) Network - Providing support to schools, families, and community partners to create and sustain comprehensive, tiered, behavioral health systems that promote prevention and interventions. www.papbs.org

Positive Behavior Interventions Supports - Provides information to local education agencies on the multi-tiered system of support for behavior. www.pattan.net (go to Behavior homepage)

Prevent Suicide PA - Providing suicide prevention education, awareness, and understanding to the commonwealth and working to reduce the stigma associated with suicide. http://preventsuicidepa.org/

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Office of Safe Schools Act 71 Page - Provides suicide prevention policy, training, and education resources to assist administrators and educators in understanding Act 71 and meeting its requirements. http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Safe%20Schools/Pages/Act-71.aspx#tab-1

PA Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS) - Provides leadership for developing a safe and drug-free environment and mental health wellness in schools and communities across the commonwealth by supporting the Student Assistance Program

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For More Information about PBIS in Pennsylvania and the PaPBS Network, contact your regional PaTTAN Office

For More Information about Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant, go to : http://www.pasocpartnership.org/about-us/additional-grants-and-partners/garrett-lee-smith-youth-suicide-prevention-grant

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