Amplifying Social Emotional Learning with **Positive Behavior** Interventions and Supports

Schools providing positive conditions for learning are characterized by safe, supportive, and challenging environments that enhance social competence and academic performance (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). Two school-based prevention approaches that aim to achieve these broad goals are Social and Emotional Learning (SEL; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2008; Elias et al., 1997; Zins & Elias, 2006) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2006; Sugai, Horner et al., 2000). The integration of these complementary models can create a comprehensive approach to meet the needs of all students (Cook, et. al., 2016; Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2006; Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2004; Strein, Hoagwood, & Cohn, 2003). In this article we will review the basics of SEL and PBIS and how the integration of these two frameworks hold the potential to amplify a variety of outcomes for students. There has been confusion around how these models can be brought to bear in a coherent manner in schools to optimize outcomes for students (Bradshaw, Bottiani, Osher, & Sugai G. 2014).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) Overview

PBIS is described as system-level flexible framework to improve the behavior of students and improve school climate (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Sugai, Horner et al., 2000). PBIS helps schools build the contexts for improving student behavior and focuses on academics, behaviors and the school environment. Schools establish a set of positively stated expectations for student behavior that apply across all school settings. Quality implementation of PBIS has been linked with significant reductions in disruptive behaviors and improved social skill knowledge (Barrett et al., 2008; Horner et al., 2009), reduced disciplinary offenses (Childs, et al., 2016), improved school climate (Konold, Cornell, Jia, Malone, 2018), reduced chronic absenteeism (Nelson, 2019), reduced bullying behavior and peer victimization (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009), reduced use of suspension by school personnel (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012), and improved academic performance (Houchens, G., Zhang, J., Davis, K., 2017). The use of token economies and incentive programs formalize and prompt acknowledgments and powerfully reinforce increasing positive student behaviors (Doll, McLaughlin, & Barretto, 2013). There is a strong emphasis on teaching, modeling and acknowledging the student use of appropriate expected behaviors so that according to Bradshaw (2013). A final element of the PBIS framework is data-based decision making to inform and guide planning (Irvin et al., 2004, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Data is collected and analyzed around key insights such as behavior referrals by location, type, time, etc. School teams then develop a process for sharing and taking action based on the data presented.

Social Emotional Learning Overview

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Leaning defines social and emotional learning as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2018). SEL is centered on the view that improving students' internal cognitions, behavioral self-management and emotional regulation are critical for students' success in school and beyond. SEL involves the mechanisms by which teachers and students learn and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL also involves the direct teaching and instruction of these competencies or skills using specific pedagogy (Bear, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Hawkins, Smith,& Catalano,2004).

A meta-analysis by Durlak and colleagues (2011) that examined results from 213 studies of universal SEL programming and found "significantly less emotional distress, fewer negative behaviors, improved school attitudes and behaviors, and better academic performance among students, with an 11 percentile-point gain in academic achievement in comparison to controls." Similarly, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) found that after-school programs that specifically sought to enhance social and interpersonal skills of students demonstrated significant improvements in self-perceptions, school bonding, social behaviors, academic performance, and problem behaviors. Similar to PBIS outcome data, implementing SEL programs has also been shown to contribute to teacher confidence and wellbeing,

including less perceived stress, self-efficacy, and increased job satisfaction (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The Practical Challenges with Implementing SEL:

As noted by PBIS.org (2018) simply adopting a curriculum does not lead to adequate implementation or improved outcomes for students. Researchers have recommended teaching social-emotional competencies within a prevention-focused, multi-tiered public health model (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017; Merrell & Gueldner, 2010). As noted earlier, SEL programming to improve academic outcomes have generally yielded positive outcomes. (Durlak et al., 2011; for a review see Zmuda & Bradshaw, 2012. However, a large study of seven different SEL programs did not demonstrate impacts on student academic achievement, behavior, or social-emotional development due to a variety of factors (Social and Character Development Consortium, 2010). There are numerous practical challenges to effective SEL implementation as outlined by Blyth (2018):

- Coherence Challenges: There are multiple frameworks available to educators in the field of SEL and there is a general the lack of consensus on an overall framework that unifies SEL research and practice.

- Communications Challenges: The issue of multiple meanings and inconsistent language. Essentially, the same words are used in very different ways, and essentially the same competencies may be called by very different names in different frameworks.

- Choosing the Right Framework to Drive Efforts: Leaders are challenged to crosswalk or align the ways different frameworks are used and translate competencies and approaches.

- Practitioner Challenges: Practitioners will move forward and either use the parts they understand, try to do too much, or perhaps in the worst case abandon the whole effort.

Additionally, a major issue in the field is that many SEL programs on the market today have not been field-tested or empirically validated through peer-reviewed research as reported in a Harvard research group study that examined over 40 different SEL frameworks. Critically, many programs lack the research-based pedagogical elements of behavior change such as accountability systems, systematic reinforcement systems, generalization strategies, modeling, role playing,

consistency across environments and distributed practice (Knoff, 2020). Finally, the fidelity with which SEL programs are implemented, as prior research documents, is clearly associated with positive student outcomes (Domitrovich, et. al., 2008).

Implementing Social Emotional Learning with Positive Behavior Interventions and Support:

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) provides an ideal framework for promoting social-emotional competencies to improve outcomes for the whole child (PBIS.org, 2018). As noted earlier trying to improve student outcomes through separate, competing initiatives is fraught with problems. The implementation of SEL through a PBIS framework makes logical sense on several levels. First, both frameworks focus on positive approaches to students as opposed to punitive methods. Second, the emphasis on primary prevention of problems early on that potentially will negatively impact academic success and the promotion of positive skills. Lastly, both frameworks emphasize the importance of a specific pedagogy for students to learn the skills that will enable them to be socially and academically successful (Cook, et. al., 2016).

"PBIS and SEL approaches differ in important ways, but they are compatible. Together, they offer the full range of strategies and techniques needed for effective classroom management and school wide discipline. Their primary aims (managing behavior versus developing self-discipline) make it difficult to implement both approaches without encountering inconsistencies in theory and practice."
- George Bear (2010, p. 12)

Combining PBIS and SEL could address some of the common limitations noted regarding the two models by creating a synergistic effect (Bradshaw, et., al., 2016). For example, PBIS literature does not offer an explicit curriculum for teaching children social-emotional skills and competencies like those taught in an SEL programs but does emphasize the importance of directly teaching,

prompting, acknowledging and reinforcing pro social behavior. PBIS also does not offer the daily integration of social, emotional, and academic learning in general classroom instruction. SEL brings added focus on children's emotions, as well as social-emotional skill development, which are not emphasized in PBIS. Conversely, SEL does not offer behavioral matrices with accountability, systematic behavioral reinforcement across the multiple environments, behavior specific praise and token economies. Specifically, the integration of PBIS and SEL provides a more complete cognitive–behavioral methodology that encompasses creating consistent, predictable and positive classrooms in which students learn the range of behavioral, social, emotional and meta-cognitive skills which is amplified as educators can deliver positive reinforcement frequent feedback and behavior specific praise to promote the acquisition and maintenance of new skills and behaviors (Cook, et. al., 2016). The positive impacts of integrating SEL and PBIS were reported in a recent study by Cook, et. el. (2016) where they examined the effects of the delivery of an integrated PBIS and SEL program. The finding indicated that this "condition produced significantly greater improvements in overall mental health and reductions in externalizing behaviors when compared to all other conditions" in the study. The table below outlines how the behavioral norms and expectations across SEL and PBIS can be aligned:

School Wide Norms and Expectations Delivered for General Behavior and SEL Skills
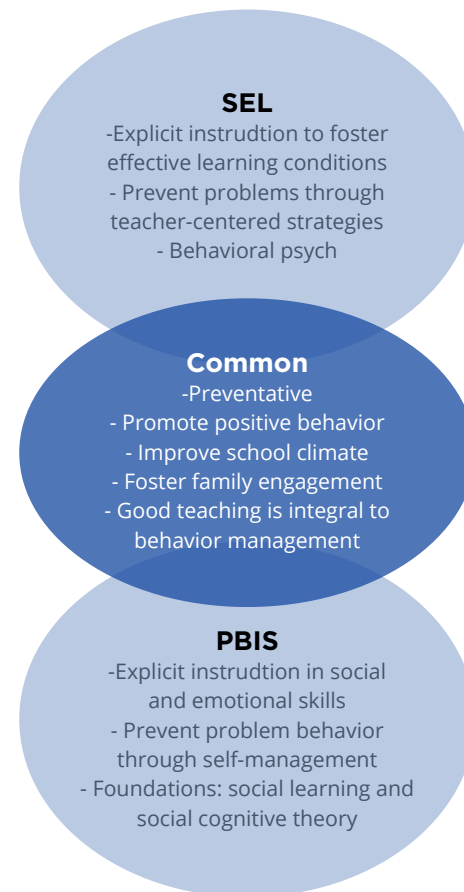
SEL Component

1. Explicit SEL school wide norm and expectation instruction

2. Common language

3. Whole school assembly

4. Explicit classroom norm expectation instruction

5. Morning meetings

6. Multiple intelligences

7. Use of common language

PBIS Component

1. Which expectations are being integrated

2. By area and populations

3. Allows tracking of data across all curriculars

4. Continuing tier 2/3 supports for non-responders

5. Data accessibility to vertical and horizontal teams

6. Accountability

7. Reinforcement and feedback

Below is a diagram outlining the complimentary nature of SEL and PBIS frameworks:

SEL
-Explicit instrudtion to foster effective learning conditions
- Prevent problems through teacher-centered strategies
- Behavioral psych

Common
-Preventative
- Promote positive behavior
- Improve school climate
- Foster family engagement
- Good teaching is integral to behavior management

PBIS
-Explicit instrudtion in social and emotional skills
- Prevent problem behavior through self-management
- Foundations: social learning and social cognitive theory

Process of Integrating PBIS and SEL:

Bradshaw, Bottiani, Osher, and Sugai (2016) offer an 11-step model for the integration in which both PBIS and SEL principles guide the initial and ongoing planning processes. This approach was developed based on lessons learned from the integration of SEL programs with PBIS through the Johns Hopkins Center

for Prevention and Early Intervention (see Domitrovich et al., 2010).   PBIS provides the three-tiered framework for implementation of SEL and other related programs and supports. SEL programming is integrated and offered the three tiers and a data-driven approach to assessing student needs which drives the selection of SEL programs. Some key points from the Bradshaw, et. al. model include:

- Commitment, Buy-In and Engagement: A steering committee is formed so that school leaders, staff and the broader community work together and recognize the value of an integrated PBIS+SEL approach to school improvement and understand what resources (e.g., time, money, staffing) will be necessary to successfully implement and sustain the approach school-wide and at the class- room level. A core requirement of PBIS implementation is to achieve at least 80% of staff buy-in or agreement to implement the approach, especially, given the requirement to implement across all school contexts, rather than in individual classrooms or settings. A vision is developed that includes the four social-emotional conditions of learning: physical and emotional safety, school connection, high expectations for performance and behavior, and teaching social-emotional core competencies.

- Assess School-Wide Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT analysis) to Integrated PBIS + SEL Implementation: SWOT is one tool that can be used to organize the existing programs and identify gaps in levels of need and inventory the schools' support services using a three-tiered model.

- Create an Action Plan for Integration: Based on the SWOT analysis, which Includes alignment of purpose, goals, benchmarks, and a common timeline the plan is designed. Once the SEL program or set of programs is selected, the integration process requires alignment of goals, activities, and language across the specific SEL program and PBIS, which contrasts with simultaneous implementation of additive or parallel programs that are unrelated (Domitrovich et al., 2010). Part of the planning should include ongoing professional development activities. The training and ongoing coaching of school staff should occur in a coordinated effort, so that the models are presented as integrated, rather than discrete efforts.

- Integrated PBIS + SEL Model Launch: Regardless of whether staff members are familiar with PBIS or SEL, implementation should be planned, integrated, phased oriented, and outcome-driven. Implementation phases include exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, and continuous regeneration. Evaluate and refine efforts for continuous Improvement. Ongoing progress monitoring of implementation fidelity and program outcomes should occur at all stages of the implementation process and can be performed through the PBIS + SEL data collection systems (e.g., surveys, teacher ratings, observations, school records) and other school, district, and state data collection systems.

Once the structure elements outlined by Bradshaw, et. al. (2016) noted above are installed, PBIS tenets are introduced to students through explicit teaching of positively-stated behavior expectations across school settings and SEL competencies as part of the PBIS framework. With a few modifications to a schools' PBIS framework, PBIS.org recommends a few important components for teaching SEL competencies through PBIS:

- **Expand the Data that Teams Use to Identify Which Skills to Teach:** Begin by determining which SEL competencies are needed to be prioritized for instruction. District leadership teams can begin with a thorough review of school, family, and community data. By including broader sources of "whole child" data, teams are better positioned to teach SEL competencies. Additionally, as with any intervention, it is important to deliver the SEL instruction at sufficient intensities and continuously monitor for improvement. Examples of data that district teams might consider include attendance data, behavior referral data, suspension data, mental health data, school climate survey results, student visits to school specialists (e.g., counselors, nurses, social workers), calls to community crisis centers, and proportion of families in the community affected by substance abuse, incarceration, or domestic abuse.

- **Teach Social-Emotional Competencies Using PBIS Instructional Systems:** Create a plan for teaching the targeted SEL competencies in which the skills are connected to the PBIS framework. Begin by mapping the SEL competencies onto the school-wide PBIS expectations by adding the competencies to a behavioral or teaching matrix (see Figure 1). This mapping is not just a set of positively stated rules but a mutable document that guides instruction and is informed by data to identify replacement skills for common erroneous behavior patterns. The matrix serves the important role of clearly defining the behavioral expectations for the SEL skills. This matrix helps all staff provide increased opportunities for students to practice across all areas and settings in the school. The matrix helps drive the common language that teachers will use to explicitly teach the skills and provides a system for reinforcement,

acknowledgment and responding instructionally to errors. All staff should model, teach, re-teach, prompt, and acknowledge the competencies across settings in the school.

Promote Adult Wellness by Creating a Nurturing Staff Environment:

It is important to provide the support needed for the adults to do the work well, such as appropriate training, technical assistance, and coaching. By doing so, you are creating an environment for the adults to be successful. With SEL competencies embedded into PBIS (e.g., social-emotional competencies directly connected to school-wide expectations and the teaching matrix), staff may be less likely to view them as an extra burden
or as a separate initiative which will increase buy-in and enthusiasm. (Figure 1)

Dr. Don Kincaid, professor in the Department of Child & Family Studies at the University of South Florida, discussed in a recent interview that schools need to be prepared to support the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students:

"Schools need to use the PBIS framework to teach the behaviors, the approaches to mental health concerns and strategies for students of how to be engaged. Social emotional learning can be taught very effectively within PBIS framework."

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