

It's Not PBIS That's Not Working

As practitioners in the field, we understand the challenges of creating effective academic and behavior systems in schools. So when we hear an educator say PBIS is not working, we know the problem is usually inconsistency of implementation or other errors contributing to its failure. Through our professional experience of working with schools on implementation of both academic and behavior Response to Intervention (RTI), we can say with confidence that if PBIS/the PBIS Champion Model (See *The PBIS Tier One Handbook*) is not implemented with fidelity, it will not work. Oftentimes, we find this is connected to the leadership or lack thereof, beliefs about discipline, and/or ineffective school systems (academic/behavior) missing critical key markers of implementation. Edwards Deming once stated, "Every system is perfectly designed to give you the outcomes you are receiving." If you want to change your outcomes, you need to change the system that is producing these undesirable results. If you think PBIS is not working for your school, it may be an indication that there is a bigger issue needing to be addressed.

Here are the top red flags connected with poor PBIS implementation:

PBIS referred to as a program – If PBIS is referred to as a program, the perception from the teachers and staff will be "this too shall pass." PBIS needs to be referred to as the behavior side of the school system; behavior Response to Intervention (RTI).

Lack of administrator buy-in – Administrators who do not believe in the fundamental markers necessary to implement a comprehensive behavior system will produce a staff who does not believe in the fundamental markers and will quickly return to the old way of responding to misbehavior; the easier way. Another common buy-in error is when an administrator assumes they are already doing everything with fidelity at their school. This is the toughest red flag to address because it involves egos and difficult conversations. This also requires intervention from the district office or supervisor level making sure the administrator knows implementation is not optional and even the best school systems need to continually assess and improve.

Administrators not understanding all tiers of implementation – Administrators who do not understand the complexity of implementation at each tier (school-wide, targeted/at-risk, and individualized) struggle to build and sustain PBIS at model levels. We commonly see principals send other site representatives to trainings and/or PBIS team meetings while they, themselves, cannot fully articulate the system they are hoping to design and implement.

Teacher and staff misunderstanding of PBIS implementation – If teachers and staff are not properly trained on the markers of implementation, the goals and outcomes of implementation, and the reasons for why it is necessary to implement, they will have a shallow understanding of what PBIS means. A shallow understanding will produce those who refer to PBIS as only tickets, incentives, banners, and no discipline. If a staff only defines PBIS in this way, it is evident they do not understand that PBIS is an RTI behavior framework.

Lack of appropriate communication with staff about alternative discipline – When teachers and staff are not supported adequately with discipline, they will blame PBIS for not punishing students. This is a game changing red flag and indicates that:

- Collaboration and communication is not taking place with regard to discipline in a timely fashion
- The expectation and culture of the school has still not shifted to the belief of helping all students learn and behave

Educators are not allowed to give up on students who are struggling academically, so why is it optional to give up on a student who is struggling behaviorally? If the administrator provides adequate and timely support to the teachers and works together to help the student, a shift will occur with the beliefs of the staff. Refer to *Don't Suspend Me: An Alternative Discipline Toolkit* as a guide for administrators and teachers to implement alternative discipline effectively.

To reiterate, it is not PBIS that is not working, it is the ***implementation*** of PBIS that is not working. So stop wasting time and start tightening up implementation. In our next article, we will provide back-to-school tips for creating behavior systems to start the school year strong.