A STUDY OF STATEWIDE LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY ACTIONS REGARDING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE "ARIZONA TASK FORCE ON BEST PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT" PERTAINING TO ADOPTION OF POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT (PBIS)

ARIZONA
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES
PLANNING COUNCIL℠

In the summer of 2009, Governor Janice K. Brewer signed Senate Bill 1197 which recognized the need for the development of alternatives to seclusion and restraint when managing the behavior and discipline of pupils with disabilities. This bill created a Legislative Task Force on Best Practices in Special Education and Behavior Management to develop recommendations on best practices. The final report prepared by the Task Force developed recommendations which strongly support Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS). Positive behavioral support is defined as: 1) outcomes that are uniquely defined and "valued" by stakeholders; 2) a behavioral and biomedical science of human behavior that provides fundamental principles for the design of support; 3) empirically validated practices for achieving identified outcomes in applied contexts; and 4) the implementation of validated practices in the context of the systems change needed for durable and generalized effects (Sugai & Horner, 2002). PBIS is a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. This report was distributed to all Local Education Agencies (LEA) and charter schools and they were required to review and consider the adoption of the recommendations contained in the report by June 30, 2010.

In March 2011, the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) commissioned the Behavior Research Center and Pynn & Associates to conduct a study to determine the extent to which LEAs and charter schools have considered adopting the Task Force's recommendations. The results of this effort consist of both primary research (LEA/Charter School Telephone Survey/Focus Groups) which looked at the implementation of PBIS in Arizona and secondary research which reviewed implementation of PBIS both locally and nationally. The LEA/Charter School Telephone Survey was comprised of 107 telephone interviews conducted with public school district superintendents and charter school administrators throughout Arizona while the focus groups (2) were composed of 16 school superintendents and principals.

Key Findings From the Primary Research

The primary research reveals that 98 percent of the Arizona school officials surveyed have at least some familiarity with the recommendations of the Legislative Task Force on Best Practices with a majority (51%) revealing that their district/school has fully adopted them. An additional 36 percent of surveyed school officials indicated that their district/school was in the process of adopting the recommendations at the time of the research while 13 percent reveal their district/school has not yet begun work on adopting the recommendations. Forty-one percent of non-adopters say they intend to do so within the coming 12 months. These findings reveal that in the neighborhood of 93 percent of Arizona LEAs and charter schools will have adopted at least some of the Task Force's recommendations by the summer of 2012.

When school officials who are complying with the Task Force's recommendations (either fully or are in the process) are asked whether or not they have adopted each of four specific recommendations the Task Force felt local education agencies should adopt, eight out of ten surveyed officials or more reveal that their district or school has adopted each recommendation: 1) parent and administration notification of crisis management actions (90%); 2) creating a positive school climate (89%); 3) restricting the use of crisis management techniques of restraint and/or seclusion (88%); and 4) training school staff in pro-active behavior management strategies (84%).

The focus groups reveal that the vast majority of educators participating in the groups are very supportive of the concepts spelled out in the PBIS model but believe that the main problems in trying to establish the recommendations are lack of funding and time. They view the recommendations of the Task Force as another unfunded mandate they are being asked to comply with. Their attitude is that, in order for the PBIS recommendations to fully work, all staff members need to participate in job-appropriate training. Such training takes time away from all staff members' basic duties, whether that be educating students or facilities maintenance, and is an expensive and time-consuming undertaking. Further, it is a generally-held belief that such training is not a one-time session, but rather an ongoing process given employee turnover.

Educators participating in the groups also strongly believe that the success of the program is dependent on whether or not all levels of school personnel fully support the PBIS model, not only front-line teachers. In order to be successful, all levels of personnel from administrators to counselors to janitors must be in support since they may need to deal with the types of situations addressed in the PBIS model. It is felt that top administration must lead this effort to obtain staff support.

Several other interesting highlights also surfaced during the groups:

- Other educational needs such as "teaching children" receive higher priority in schools, thereby limiting the amount of time and effort that can be dedicated to PBIS.
- Some educators felt that the Task Force's recommendations are unnecessary since they had already adopted the Boys Town Education Model (Wells,1991) or the RTI Model for school-based intervention strategies (Jimmerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007). They felt these two Models to be appropriate for their facilities and do not wish to be forced by the state into adopting its PBIS Model.
- There is universal agreement among educators that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports should apply to all students, not just students with disabilities.

Educators participating in the groups are in general agreement that their school board has been supportive of their effort to adopt the recommendations. However, in many cases, educators feel their board is not very knowledgeable about PBIS and their support is limited to a directive to "go take care of this thing." Only one of 16 educators indicates that their board regularly reviewed the status of their efforts regarding PBIS.

Educators participating in the groups are also in general agreement that the Arizona Department of Education and Legislature do very little in supporting schools' efforts to adopt the legislature's recommendations. They feel that while these two entities might do some monitoring of the program, they do little or nothing in providing professional development resources. If a district or school wishes to bring in some training resources, they have to hire a private company to provide it – nothing is available from the state. They feel that if the Legislature is going to mandate that schools adopt PBIS, it should provide adequate funding and support to allow them to succeed.

Educators participating in the groups are in universal agreement that the number one step the Arizona Department of Education and Legislature could take to assist in their efforts to comply with the PBIS guidelines is to provide funding so that school personnel can be adequately trained. If direct funding is not available, then any type of training support such as state-provided trainers/councilors and instructional materials would be beneficial.

Educators participating in the groups generally believe that the PBIS Program is worthwhile and will generate positive results in schools. At the same time, several educators stated that PBIS is the "flavor of the month" and will be replaced with something else in the future.

Key Findings From the Secondary Research

A review of 20 Arizona LEA board meeting minutes reveal that five of the ten sampled school districts had adopted PBIS in accord with SB 1197 – each of which were in urban Arizona. The ten charter schools for which school board minutes and other online information were reviewed did not show evidence of adopting PBIS. The Advisory Board should develop a process by which to monitor charter school adoption of PBIS.

The use and effectiveness of PBIS has been addressed in detail in a substantial number of articles published since 1993. See, for example, several published documents by Sugai & Horner (2002, 2005, 2008). This literature shows that PBIS has proven to be a very effective approach to ensure that students have a positive environment in which to succeed.

A review of national and state PBIS policies shows that most states have embraced the approach and have policies in place to move toward statewide implementation of the approach (George & Martinez, 2007). In 2008 there were 31 state PBIS teams representing 8,000 schools actively implementing PBIS. (Spaulding, Horner, May, & Vincent, 2008). Currently there are more than 9,000 PBIS schools in 40 states (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Seven states were reviewed to assess the success of PBIS implementation (See Appendix 5.0, Additional Details on the Success of States Implementing PBIS). The assessment reveals a consistent pattern of significant reductions in office discipline referrals, in-school suspensions and out of school suspensions. Test scores were also positively affected in many schools as a result.

Finally, while most states have implemented legislation regulating the use of restraints and seclusion, there are 18 states that do not have statutory requirements regarding the use of these disciplinary approaches (See Appendix 6.0, Additional Data on Current Federal and State Action in Implementing Legislation Regulating the Use of Restraints and Seclusion). Currently, there is substantial activity among 30 states that are in the process of developing or revising statutes addressing restraints and seclusion.

Study Team Recommendations

Begin with the PBIS momentum that Arizona had for 11 years and develop approaches to continue the PBISAz Program. See http://www.pbisaz.org/ for details of this program, which was discontinued as of June 30, 2010.

Contact all past and current PBIS trainers and administrators to create and schedule a series of Advisory Board organizational meetings to discuss how PBIS can regain its momentum. Invite legislators and select a group of educators who are considered to be champions of PBIS. Schedule and hold Advisory Board organizational meetings to develop an action plan designed to put PBIS in the spotlight in Arizona.

Develop and maintain Leadership Teams to oversee PBIS implementation.

Membership in State or LEA Leadership Teams should be considered by the Advisory Board. It is suggested that Leadership Teams in key states be reviewed to discover the best mix of persons for Arizona Teams. Several models can be used to guide the development of the leadership team. In Florida, District Leadership Teams direct PBIS activities in the 67 county school districts in that state. In Vermont, a statewide coordinator works with implementation coaches at the local level. North Carolina has an active Positive Behavior Support Leadership Team that includes state and local representation as well as professionals from college and university professional development programs and community agencies. The team has a focused Action Plan and meets regularly to define and refine the work being done in North Carolina's PBS schools.

Seek partnerships to help replicate a statewide organization such as that of North Carolina.

These partnerships could help develop a statewide organization such as that used in North Carolina. The 14 State-level staff model in North Carolina (about 1/3 larger than Arizona) could be replicated in Arizona with a staff of nine persons broken down as follows: One Director, a Section Chief, and seven regional PBS coordinators.

Consider partnerships with the ADDPC and other appropriate agencies, such as strategically located LEAs, to implement and evaluate the program.

The following agencies should be contacted to discuss partnerships: Arizona Center of Disability Law; Northern Arizona University, Institute for Human Development (IHD); Arizona State University; University of Arizona, Sonoran UCEDD; Selected LEAs who have PBIS experience

As program builds, develop a network of LEA coaches. Materials are currently available to train coaches from the PBISAz website (PBISAz, 2011).

For legislation, build on models in Maryland and North Carolina.

In 2002, the Maryland General Assembly enacted a law requiring the Maryland State Department of Education to convene a taskforce to address exclusion restraint, and seclusion of students in local school systems and nonpublic special education facilities throughout Maryland. Regulations were promulgated and the implementation of these regulations was effective beginning September 2003 [COMAR 13A.08.04]. The State Board of Education approved amendments to these regulations on August 25, 2009 (State of Maryland, 2011).

North Carolina has evidence of each of the following recommended best practices in policy, regulation or guidance documents (North Carolina, 2011): 1) Clear definitions of relevant terms such as “seclusion” and “restraint” and “emergency”; 2) Clear limitations on what seclusion and restraint techniques specifically are limited or not allowed; 3) Specifies when seclusion and restraint techniques may be used (for example, that seclusion and restraint only be used as a physical safety procedure, or if permitted as “treatment” or “behavioral intervention” in limited circumstances, the circumstances under which this is permitted.