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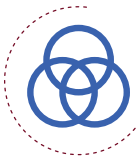
Positive Behavioral  
Interventions & Supports



# USING A PBIS FRAMEWORK: WORKING SMARTER, NOT HARDER IN RURAL SCHOOLS

KAREN ROBBIE, JANET VAN LONE,  
LAURA KERN & HEATHER PESHAK GEORGE

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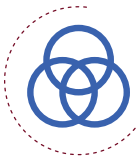
# Using a PBIS Framework: Working Smarter, Not Harder in Rural Schools

**Authors** Karen Robbie  
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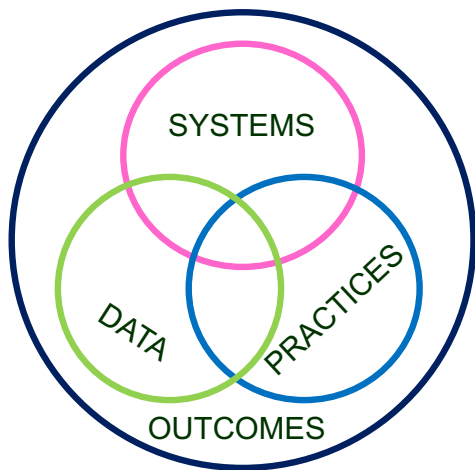
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## Introduction

**R**ural schools have both strengths and challenges to face when educating students (McDaniel & Bloomfield, 2020). For example, rural settings might have less access to resources compared to schools in other geographical areas (Steed et al., 2013). Rural schools often have difficulty hiring and retaining highly qualified staff, such as special education teachers (Berry et al., 2011) and school psychologists (Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021), often the staff who have the expertise to address unique or intensive student challenges. However, rural settings have strengths that they can draw from, such as strong community and family involvement (Rude & Miller, 2018). Drawing from those strengths to work smarter, not harder, can help address barriers and create positive and lasting student outcomes. One way to do this is to start with PBIS.



Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a problem-solving approach that shifts emphasis from a reactionary to a preventive mindset. The PBIS framework relies on a coordinated approach that incorporates systems, practices, and data to achieve better student outcomes. For example, a school might have a way to recognize appropriate student behavior, such as a reward system (**systems**), that relies on staff recognizing students when they see appropriate behavior (**practices**), and has a way to identify and track settings where challenging behavior is more likely to occur and thus less rewards are given (**data**). This information is used by the school leadership team to look for ways to increase prosocial student behavior in that setting (**outcomes**).



## Problem-Solving within the PBIS Framework

While the PBIS framework is beneficial for many schools across the country, some schools might find it difficult to know how to identify and address some of the unique challenges they might face. Using PBIS supports schools in building a continuum of supports to promote the social, emotional, and behavioral

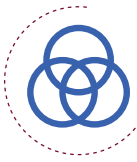


(SEB) growth of all students, including students with disabilities across all settings (Sugai et al., 2000). This problem-solving approach to address challenges helps educators identify solutions and allows leadership teams to conduct ongoing student data reviews, wisely select evidence-based practices derived from data, progress monitor implementation fidelity and outcomes, and build or modify current systems and practices to increase staff and student outcomes.

While there are different types of problem-solving approaches with a variety of steps available, this brief will describe how to use a 4-step problem-solving approach to address challenges and choose solutions that account for strengths. The 4 steps are:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Analyzing the problem
3. Intervening
4. Evaluating if the intervention worked





A school can use the problem-solving process in many ways while engaging in PBIS. For example, a rural school may wish to start implementing PBIS but have limited funding to support their efforts (**identifying the problem**). They look at what is already available to see if there are funding sources that can be shifted to support PBIS or if donations can be made by community organizations (**analyzing the problem**). Next, they come up with an action plan to re-allocate some resources and contact their local youth center (**intervening**). Finally, they look at their efforts to see if enough funds were raised or if they have to explore other ideas (**evaluating if it worked**). If the funding problem is not solved, the school would restart the process.

## Using the Working Smarter Matrix

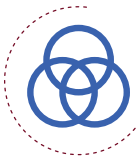
Given some of the barriers faced by schools, especially those in rural areas, the *Working Smarter Matrix* matches interventions with current PBIS resources to assist a school team in using an efficient and effective problem-solving process. As part of the problem-solving process and after PBIS teams have identified and analyzed the problem, they can use this matrix to select an appropriate intervention approach and locate corresponding, hyperlinked resources to support that approach.

Two problem-solving scenarios are provided showing how a school leadership team problem-solved using the matrix to help identify relevant resources.

*Greentree School is a rural school. School leaders have struggled to find resources to support their school, staff, and students to address some of the problems related to being in a rural area. The school leadership team has chosen to start with their PBIS system and adopt a problem-solving approach to identify strategies to support their needs. Access to in-person technical assistance and coaching is limited due to budgetary constraints and the remote geographical area of the school. The school relies on the free, readily available resources provided by the Center on PBIS and regional PBIS networks to provide training and support for their implementation process.*

### Problem One

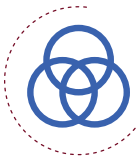
- 1. Identifying the problem:** Greentree School has been asked by their district leadership to address bullying in their school.
- 2. Analyzing the problem:** The PBIS team met and realized they were not collecting data on the frequency of bullying. In fact, they were not even sure bullying really was a problem in their school or what they would need to address it, if needed. To respond to their leadership's request, they conducted a school climate survey and added a question on bullying. After looking at the results of the survey, they realized students were reporting that bullying was occurring at the school, with a small sub-set of students with disabilities reporting being bullied 2-3 times a week.



- 3. Intervening:** Greentree School decided that they would like to **maximize resources** using their PBIS framework to address bullying. Rather than adding in another stand-alone initiative, they mapped out what they already had in place to address this behavior. They examined their existing school-wide expectations matrix on addressing positive alternatives and decided to expand it by adding examples, such as bystanders seeking help if they saw bullying. They also planned on integrating bullying prevention strategies into their Tier 1 health curriculum for all students. Because their data showed that students with disabilities were experiencing higher rates of bullying, they expanded the special education program planning by adding strategies to teach students how to seek help and respond to bullying. They used several resources from the *Working Smarter Matrix* to help them align their initiatives within a PBIS framework beginning with the [Technical Guide for Alignment of Initiatives, Programs and Practices in School Districts](#).<sup>1</sup>
- 4. Evaluating if it worked:** At the end of the year, the PBIS team will administer another school climate survey that includes a question on bullying to see if there was a reduction in bullying behavior. Based on results, they will determine if further intervention is needed, and how the team can develop a system for routine progress monitoring of bullying behavior.
- 2. Analyzing the problem:** The PBIS team met to examine their attendance data. They saw that compared to other schools within the district, Greentree School had higher rates of chronic absenteeism. In response, they invited community leaders from town to explore why students were skipping class frequently and what the students may have been doing when they skipped class. The team found that many students were actively caring for younger siblings because their parents were working and, in some cases, the parents were unable to care for young siblings because of issues related to opioid addiction.
- 3. Intervening:** Greentree School decided to **support well-being** and **maximize resources** by addressing mental health and well-being within their PBIS framework. To start educating themselves on these issues, the leadership team members and community leaders accessed free webinars and implementation materials on [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org). Additionally, they decided to **adjust and communicate expectations** to improve attendance. Within their school-wide teaching matrix, they added, “being in class on time” as an example of Being Respectful. In a recent survey to families, provided with both online and paper versions due to internet accessibility challenges, families indicated they would like to be more involved with the school’s celebrations recognizing positive student behaviors. Greentree School decided that they would like to **recognize strengths** by forming a committee that included families to establish a “choose-your-own reward system” for students when they reached pre-determined high rates of attendance each quarter (e.g., attending 90% of all classes). To address the students who

## Problem Two

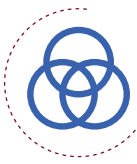
- 1. Identifying the problem:** The Principal of Greentree School believes that students are skipping classes too frequently and has asked the PBIS team to address this problem.



had missed more than 10% of school days to date, targeted support was established using a behavior report card based on the school-wide expectations. Specific performance feedback was provided to students daily throughout the day and points earned could be redeemed in the school store as part of the school-wide reward system. The team also engaged in **thinking** proactively by implementing a free substance abuse prevention curriculum offered by their state to develop awareness among students, staff, and families. They used several resources from the *Working Smarter Matrix* to help them brainstorm solutions including [Aligning and Integrating Mental Health and PBIS to Build Priority for Wellness](#),<sup>2</sup> [Using the PBIS Framework to Address the Opioid Crisis in School](#),<sup>3</sup> and [Improving Attendance and Reducing Chronic Absenteeism](#).<sup>4</sup>

- 4. Evaluating if it worked:** At the end of the next quarter, the PBIS team will look at (a) their attendance data to see if there was an increase in students attending classes, and (b) the number of students who earned rewards for higher attendance (i.e., greater than 90%) to ensure most identified students met the pre-determined target. They plan to monitor their implementation progress and fidelity by completing the Team Implementation Checklist and Tiered Fidelity Inventory offered through [PBISApps](#).

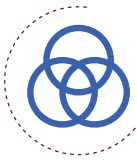




**Table 1. Working Smarter Matrix: Matching Resources to Identify Needs**

This table contains resources for schools engaging in the problem-solving process organized by topic.

Intervention Approach	Resources
<b>[S]upport Well-being</b>	
Develop and maintain systems to support wellness.	<a href="#">Aligning and Integrating Mental Health and PBIS to Build Priority for Wellness<sup>5</sup></a> <a href="#">Building a Culture of Staff Wellness Through MTSS<sup>6</sup></a>
Integrate community supports into schools, such as mental health.	<a href="#">Advancing Education Effectiveness: Interconnecting School Mental Health and School-Wide Positive Behavior Support<sup>7</sup></a> <a href="#">Installing an Interconnected Systems Framework at the School Level: Recommendations and Examples to Guide School Leadership Teams, Practitioners and Coaches<sup>8</sup></a>
Consider ways schools can play a role in addressing other community health needs.	<a href="#">Using the PBIS Framework to Address the Opioid Crisis in School<sup>9</sup></a>
<b>[M]aximize Resources</b>	
Choose programs that work together.	<a href="#">Technical Guide for Alignment of Initiatives, Programs and Practices in School Districts<sup>10</sup></a> <a href="#">Integrating a Trauma-Informed Approach within a PBIS Framework<sup>11</sup></a>
Share ways for families to connect home and school strategies.	<a href="#">Supporting Families with PBIS at Home<sup>12</sup></a> <a href="#">Supporting Families with PBIS at Home—Spanish version<sup>13</sup></a> <a href="#">Family Plan for Positive Behavior at Home<sup>14</sup></a>
Use technology to increase access to resources.	<a href="#">Adapting PBIS Practices for Rural Settings: Remote Instruction Strategy Matrix<sup>15</sup></a> <a href="#">Remote Learning for Families: Keeping it Accessible, Keeping it Positive<sup>16</sup></a>
<b>[A]djust and Communicate Expectations</b>	
Set expectations that students attend school and reward their attendance.	<a href="#">Improving Attendance and Reducing Chronic Absenteeism<sup>17</sup></a> <a href="#">Improving Attendance in a Remote Learning Environment<sup>18</sup></a>
Define staff responsibilities and expectations for meetings, committee involvement, and professional development, especially during challenging times.	<a href="#">Returning to School During and After Crisis: A Guide to Supporting States, Districts, Schools, Educators, and Students through a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Framework<sup>19</sup></a> <a href="#">Tier 1 Coordination and Problem-Solving Team Meeting Foundations<sup>20</sup></a>



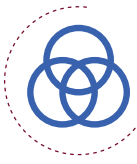
Intervention Approach	Resources
<b>[R]ecognize Strengths</b>	
Use universal screeners to identify specific needs and match with resources.	<a href="#">Systematic Screening for Behavior in Current K-12 Instructional Settings<sup>21</sup></a> <a href="#">Systematic Screening Tools: Universal Behavior Screeners<sup>22</sup></a> <a href="#">Universal Screening – Systematic Screening to Shape Instruction<sup>23</sup></a> <a href="#">Tips for Communicating with Your Community about Systematic Screening<sup>24</sup></a>
Increase support for staff, students, and community during challenges.	<a href="#">Supporting PBIS Implementation Through Phases of Recovery<sup>25</sup></a>
Collaborate with families and communities.	<a href="#">Family-School Collaboration in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: Creating a School Atmosphere to Promote Collaboration<sup>26</sup></a> <a href="#">Family and Community Engagement Webinar<sup>27</sup></a>
<b>[T]hink Proactively</b>	
Use data to make decisions and address challenges.	<a href="#">Using Discipline Data within SWPBIS to Identify and Address Disproportionality: A Guide for School Teams<sup>28</sup></a> <a href="#">Data-Analyst’s Worksheet<sup>29</sup></a> <a href="#">School-wide Screening For At-Risk Students: Best Practices and School Examples<sup>30</sup></a>
Identify a few interventions that work, are matched to needs, and are done accurately.	<a href="#">Selecting and Implementing Evidence-based Practices Webinar<sup>31</sup></a> <a href="#">References for the Evidence base of PBIS<sup>32</sup></a> <a href="#">National Center on Intensive Interventions Tools Chart<sup>33</sup></a>

## Conclusion

Rural schools face on-going challenges as they seek to educate students effectively and efficiently. However, they also have great strengths that they can draw from to support their endeavors. This brief helps schools engaging in PBIS by using a problem-solving

process to match their interventions with available resources and enhance their ability to work smarter, not harder. You can also learn more by watching the [PBIS Implementation in Rural Settings webinar<sup>34</sup>](#).





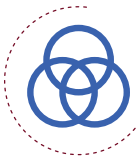
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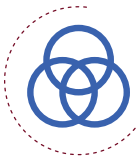
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## Embedded Hyperlinks

1. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/technical-guide-for-alignment-of-initiatives-programs-and-practices-in-school-districts>
2. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/aligning-and-integrating-mental-health-and-pbis-to-build-priority-for-wellness>
3. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/using-the-pbis-framework-to-address-the-opioid-crisis-in-schools>
4. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/improving-attendance-and-reducing-chronic-absenteeism>
5. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/aligning-and-integrating-mental-health-and-pbis-to-build-priority-for-wellness>
6. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/building-a-culture-of-staff-wellness-through-multi-tiered-system-of-supports>
7. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/advancing-education-effectiveness-interconnecting-school-mental-health-and-school-wide-positive-behavior-support>
8. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/installing-an-interconnected-systems-framework-at-the-school-level-recommendations-and-examples-to-guide-school-leadership-teams-practitioners-and-coaches>
9. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/using-the-pbis-framework-to-address-the-opioid-crisis-in-schools>
10. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/technical-guide-for-alignment-of-initiatives-programs-and-practices-in-school-districts>
11. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/integrating-a-trauma-informed-approach-within-a-pbis-framework>
12. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home>
13. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home-spanish-translation>
14. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/family-plan-for-positive-behavior-at-home>
15. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/adapting-pbis-practices-for-rural-settings-remote-instruction-strategy-matrix>
16. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/remote-learning-for-families-keeping-it-accessible-keeping-it-positive>
17. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/improving-attendance-and-reducing-chronic-absenteeism>
18. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/improving-attendance-in-a-remote-learning-environment>
19. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis>
20. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/tier-1-coordination-and-problem-solving-team-meeting-foundations>
21. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/systematic-screening-for-behavior-in-current-k-12-instructional-settings>
22. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/systematic-screening-tools-universal-behavior-screeners>
23. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/universal-screening-systematic-screening-to-shape-instruction>
24. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/tips-for-communicating-with-your-community-about-systematic-screening-what-does-your-district-and-school-leadership-team-need-to-know>
25. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-pbis-implementation-through-phases-of-crisis-recovery>
26. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/family-school-collaboration-in-positive-behavioral-interventions-and-supports-creating-a-school-atmosphere-to-promote-collaboration>



27. <https://www.pbis.org/video/family-and-community-engagement-sctg-webinar>
28. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/using-discipline-data-within-swpbis-to-identify-and-address-disproportionality-a-guide-for-school-teams>
29. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/data-analysts-worksheet>
30. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/school-wide-screening-for-at-risk-students-best-practices-and-school-examples>
31. <https://www.pbis.org/video/selecting-and-implementing-evidence-based-practices-sctg-webinar>
32. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/references-for-the-evidence-base-of-pbis>
33. <https://intensiveintervention.org/about-charts-resources>
34. <https://www.pbis.org/video/pbis-implementation-in-rural-settings>