

# PBIS Forum 18 Practice Brief: Integrating Equity and PBIS Efforts at the District Level

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PBIS Leadership Forum- *Roundtable Dialogue*

December 2018

## Rationale

Today's schools are populated with students from diverse backgrounds and with different needs. Starting in the 2013-2014 school year, the percentage of students of color (i.e., non-white students) has been more (50.4%) than the percentage of white students (49.5%) in public schools during the (MacFarland et al., 2017). Unfortunately, as the diverse enrollment rises so does the rate of disparate treatment experienced by these students. Schools and districts continue to implement harmful practices (e.g., discriminatory discipline policies, exclusionary discipline practices such as in-school-suspension [ISS], out-of-school suspension [OSS]) that disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities across the nation. For example, black preschool students lead their peers of all races in rates of OSS (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2016). Such disparities continue into K–12 schools. Black students in K–12 schools are 3.8 times more likely to receive one or more OSS compared to their white peers (ED, 2016). Additionally, the rate of referrals to law enforcement and arrest for black students has increased by five percentage points over the course of one school year (2013-2014 to 2015-2016; ED, 2018). Research has shown that students of color are also at a higher risk of being referred for special education evaluation (Skiba, Albrecht, & Losen, 2013).

According to the most recent Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP) Annual Report to Congress, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students were disproportionality more likely to receive special education services than all other racial/ethnic groups (Department of Education Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS], 2017). However, of the three, Black students were more likely to receive services for subjective disability categories (e.g., 2.0 times more likely for emotional disturbance, 2.2 times more likely for intellectual disability, 1.5 times more likely for specific learning disability, and 1.4 times more likely for other health impairment) than were students in all other racial/ethnic groups combined for that disability category (OSERS, 2017).

Like their peers of color without disabilities, students of color with disabilities are overrepresented in their receipt of exclusionary discipline practices. For example, more than 20% of American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 25% of black, and 27% of multiracial males with disabilities received one or more OSS, whereas their white, male classmates represented 10% of OSS. Further, more than 20% of multiracial females with disabilities received one or more OSS compared to 5% of their white, female peers with disabilities. These data are disheartening, as they have residual effects.

On average, students with disabilities “lose over 56 days of instruction per 100 students with disabilities enrolled” (Losen, 2018, p.1). Thus, because Black students with disabilities have higher rates of exclusionary practices, they also lose more access to instruction than their peers, placing them even further behind both academically and socially (Lee, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Exclusionary discipline practices also lead to decreased academic achievement, dropout, and involvement in juvenile justice facilities (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013). This trajectory is known as the preschool-to-prison pipeline.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial that districts ensure no student is hampered from acquiring a genuine learning experience due to inequitable practices. The changing demographics of the student population requires districts to thoughtfully and strategically meet the needs of a diverse student body. Likewise, the stagnant demographics of the teacher workforce requires districts to challenge the traditional Eurocentric practices and perspectives used in classrooms that privilege white students but disenfranchise students of color. In order to obtain these goals, districts should integrate equity and PBIS efforts into district level systems.

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## Procedures

1. Establish a District Leadership Team (or work within a current multi-tiered system of support team). A district leadership team should be made up of stakeholders from the school environment and have representation from a community member (e.g., family member) with roles and expectations allocated by an administrator (Green, Cohen, & Stormont, 2018).
2. Develop a Mission Statement. The district leadership team's mission should reflect a commitment to creating and maintaining systems that are devoted to equity and data-based decision making (Green et al., 2015).
3. Create or Re-evaluate Discipline Policies. A goal of the district leadership team should be to create new policies, or revisit old policies. Specifically, discipline policies should include elements that assess implicit and explicit bias; minimize inequitable practices; and set procedures for ongoing assessment, improvement, and accountability (Green et al., 2015).
4. PBIS Implementation Blueprint and Self-Assessment. The PBIS Implementation Blueprint is designed to assist district leadership teams in building capacity “for sustainable, culturally and contextually relevant, and high fidelity implementation of multi-tiered practices and systems of support” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2018, p.3). The district leadership team can use this blueprint to guide their assessment, development, and implementation of action plans.
5. Data-based Decision Making. Using data to drive decisions is a critical step in improving equitable access to instruction and support. McIntosh, Barnes, Eliason, & Morris (2014) recommend beginning with identifying the problem, analyzing the problem, making and implementing a plan, and evaluating the plan. Therefore, district leadership teams should establish a system for routinely collecting, analyzing, and disaggregating data as well as engaging in problem-solving.

## Specific Implementation Examples

1. Empirical evidence for district-wide implementation is forthcoming as a result of Department of Education School Climate Transformation Grants. However, Peshak George, Cox, Minch, and Sandomierski (2018) were one of the first to examine characteristics successful district-wide implementation of PBIS. The researchers examined the characteristics of six large school districts with high proportions of schools implementing PBIS with fidelity and positive discipline outcomes in Florida. Findings from the study yielded eight themes that aided in the successful implementation of PBIS across districts. These themes included a District Coordinator, Coaches, District Teaming, Internal Implementation Drivers, Leadership Buy-In and Support, District Data Infrastructure, Direct Support to Schools, and Communication.

## Frequently asked questions

### **Q: What is the difference between equity and equality in the area of education?**

**A:** Equality is providing all students with equal access to instruction, services, and support. In comparison, equity is meeting the individual needs of students. Therefore, everyone receives access to individualized levels of instruction, services, and supports. America's Promise Alliance, The Aspen Education & Society Program, and the Council of Chief State School Officers provide this definition of educational equity, “Educational

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equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income” (2018, p. 5).

## **Q: How can districts involve external educational stakeholders in integrating equity and PBIS?**

**A:** Collaboration between districts and external stakeholders (e.g., family members, community agency representatives, local government leaders) is a very important component to increasing equity within a school district. Collaboration should be proactive, ongoing, authentic, and forthcoming. Districts can include stakeholders on teams or sub-committees in order to ensure their voice and perspectives are heard and valued. Additionally, districts can survey stakeholders to gather various perspectives on different matters.

## **Resources**

OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

- A 5-Point Intervention Approach for Enhancing Equity in School Discipline
  - <https://www.pbis.org/Common/Cms/files/pbisresources/A%205-Point%20Intervention%20Approach%20for%20Enhancing%20Equity%20in%20School%20Discipline.pdf>
- District Level PBIS
  - <https://www.pbis.org/school/district-level>

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