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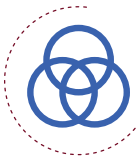
**PBIS**

Positive Behavioral  
Interventions & Supports

# **CENTERING EQUITY WITHIN THE PBIS FRAMEWORK: OVERVIEW AND EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

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# Centering Equity within the PBIS Framework: Overview and Evidence of Effectiveness

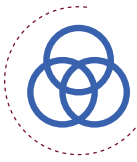
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## Purpose

**R**acial and ethnic inequities in school discipline are widespread and persistent, even in schools implementing PBIS with fidelity. Yet integrating components of a multicomponent equity-centered approach into existing tiered frameworks is showing promise for improving equity in student outcomes. This brief describes the Center on PBIS's 5-Point Equity Approach and the evidence for its positive effects on discipline disproportionality.

## Key Takeaways

- Although PBIS is a promising framework for increasing equity in school discipline, eliminating racial inequities in school discipline may require a more explicit focus on equity within the tiered framework.
- Across multiple studies, models that leverage the Center's 5-Point Equity Approach have demonstrated evidence of acceptability, feasibility, and effectiveness.
- Teams at multiple levels can use the Center's 5-Point Equity Approach and related equity resources from the Center on PBIS to reduce inequities in student outcomes.



## Description of the Problem

Racial and ethnic inequities in the use of exclusionary school discipline is a deep-seated challenge in education that will not be solved by simple or time-limited solutions. Ample evidence documents that exclusionary discipline deprives students of a positive school environment and harms academic achievement, even for non-disciplined students (Huang & Cornell, 2018; Lcoe & Steinberg, 2019). The overuse of punitive discipline practices contributes to unequal educational and lifelong opportunities for historically marginalized students. Despite a general decrease in the use of school discipline over the past decade, the discipline gap has persisted, especially for Black or African American students (Gage et al., 2020; Gion et al., 2018; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Meek et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021), although Indigenous and Latino/a/e students experience higher rates of exclusionary discipline in high schools as well (Gage et al., 2020; Gion et al., 2018).

A promising approach for ameliorating inequities in discipline integrates equity-centered elements into existing multi-tiered systems of support (Gregory et al., 2021). A widely implemented multi-tiered approach shown to reduce disparities is schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS; Sugai & Horner, 2020). Evaluation studies have demonstrated that schools implementing PBIS with fidelity have lower racial discipline disparities, yet these disparities are not always eradicated ([Do Schools Implementing SWPBIS Have Decreased Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality in School Discipline?](#)<sup>1</sup> McIntosh,



Gion, et al., 2018; Vincent et al., 2011). In response, the Center on PBIS has moved toward an equity-centered approach that leverages and extends the strengths of PBIS by explicitly and intentionally placing equity within the outcomes, practices, data, and systems of the framework (McIntosh, Girvan, et al., 2018). The purpose of this brief is to summarize the research evidence supporting the Center's 5-Point Equity Approach.

## Key Components of an Equity-Centered Approach

The Center's [5-Point Equity Approach](#)<sup>2</sup> was proposed to disrupt the complex and multifaceted challenge of racial and ethnic inequities in school discipline. This multicomponent approach includes five overall components, including recommendations for teaming, policy work, professional development, and coaching to ensure PBIS systems match the strengths, values,



and needs of students, their families, and their communities. The recommendations are as follows:

1. collect, use, and report disaggregated data
2. implement a behavior framework that is preventive, multi-tiered, and culturally responsive
3. use engaging instruction to reduce the opportunity (achievement) gap
4. develop policies with accountability for disciplinary equity
5. teach strategies for neutralizing implicit bias in discipline decisions

## Resources for Implementation

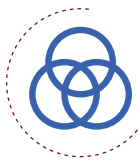
Information about the [Center's 5-Point Equity Approach and aligned equity resources](#)<sup>3</sup> are available in the Equity topic at The Center's website. These resources include a [discipline disproportionality data guide](#)<sup>4</sup> (McIntosh et al., 2014), the [PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide](#)<sup>5</sup> (Levenson et al., 2021), a brief on [engaging and evidence based academic instruction](#)<sup>6</sup> (Chaparro et al., 2015), and a [guide on revising school discipline policies to improve equity](#)<sup>7</sup> (Green et al., 2015). There are also [libraries of presentations](#)<sup>8</sup> and [videos](#)<sup>9</sup> that describe this approach.

## Research Supporting the Center's Equity Approach

Since the development of the Center's 5-Point Equity Approach over 5 years ago, several research teams from different institutions have implemented it and examined outcomes in schools across the United States. The evidence base ranges from case studies to experimental single case studies and randomized controlled trials (see Table 1). Overall, results have

found the approach to be acceptable to administrators and teachers, feasible with typical resources, and able to be implemented with fidelity (Bastable et al., 2021; Bastable et al., 2019; Gion et al., 2022; McIntosh, Girvan, Fairbanks Falcon, et al., 2021; Muldrew & Miller, 2021). More importantly, the approach has been shown effective for a range of outcomes:

- Decreased racial inequities in exclusionary school discipline (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Gion et al., 2022; McIntosh, Ellwood, et al., 2018; McIntosh, Girvan, Fairbanks Falcon, et al., 2021; Payno-Simmons, 2021; Swain-Bradway et al., 2019)
- Decreased use of exclusionary school discipline for non-Black students as well (McIntosh, Girvan, Fairbanks Falcon, et al., 2021; Swain-Bradway et al., 2019)
- Decreased racial inequities in teacher praise to reprimand ratios (Gion et al., 2022; Knochel et al., 2022)
- Improved teacher ratings of student behavior (prosocial and disruptive) (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Muldrew & Miller, 2021)
- Decreased racial academic disparities ([Do Wisconsin Schools Implementing an Integrated Academic and Behavior Support Framework Improve Equity in Academic and School Discipline Outcomes?](#)<sup>10</sup> Swain-Bradway et al., 2019)
- Improved preschool personnel's capacity to support children's development of social, emotional, and behavioral growth (Fox et al., 2021)
- Improved perceptions of school climate (McIntosh, Girvan, McDaniel, et al., 2021)
- Improved school connectedness (Cook et al., 2018)
- Time saved for administrative duties and instructional activities (Swain-Bradway et al., 2019)



**Table 1. Studies Assessing Effectiveness of Equity-centered PBIS Approach**

Study	Design	Unit of Analysis	Fidelity	Outcomes	Equity-centered PBIS Approach Components				
					Disaggregated Data	Culturally Responsive Behavior Framework	Engaging Academic Instruction	Policy Development	Strategies for Neutralizing
<b>Bradshaw et al., 2018</b>	RCT	Classrooms	SET Attendance CCU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> <li>• Self-reported culturally responsive behavior management and efficacy</li> <li>• Student behavior rates</li> <li>• Teacher praise rates</li> <li>• Teacher reprimand rates</li> </ul>	•	•	•		•
<b>Cook et al., 2018</b>	Exp. SC	Schools	Rubric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> <li>• School Connectedness</li> </ul>	•	•	•		•
<b>Fox et al., 2021</b>	Case Study	Programs	EC-BoQ TPOt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expulsions</li> <li>• ODRs</li> <li>• SEB skills</li> <li>• Suspensions</li> </ul>	•	•		•	•
<b>Gion et al., 2022</b>	Exp. SC	Classrooms	Checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> <li>• Teacher praise rates</li> <li>• Teacher reprimand rates</li> </ul>	•	•			
<b>Knochel et al., 2022</b>	Exp. SC	Classrooms	Checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior ratings</li> <li>• Teacher praise rates</li> <li>• Teacher reprimand rates</li> </ul>	•	•			
<b>McIntosh et al., 2018</b>	Case Study	School	TFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> </ul>	•				•
<b>McIntosh et al., 2021a</b>	Quasi-exp.	Schools	TFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> <li>• School Climate Surveys</li> <li>• Suspensions</li> </ul>	•	•	•		•
<b>McIntosh et al., 2021b</b>	RCT	Schools	TFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> </ul>	•	•	•		•
<b>Muldrew &amp; Miller 2021</b>	Exp. SC	Classrooms	TFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior ratings</li> <li>• ODRs</li> </ul>		•			
<b>Payno-Simmons, 2021</b>	Case Study	School	TFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODRs</li> </ul>	•	•		•	•
<b>Swain-Bradway et al., 2019</b>	Case Study	Schools	SIR BoQ TFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Achievement</li> <li>• Suspensions</li> <li>• Time saved</li> </ul>	•	•	•	•	

Exp. SC = Experimental Single Case, Quasi-exp. = Quasi-experimental, RCT = Randomized controlled trial, ODRs = Office discipline referrals, VDPs = Vulnerable decision points, NRs= Neutralizing routines. Fidelity measures included the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Horner et al., 2004), Classroom Check-up fidelity measure (Reinke et al., 2011), Early Childhood Program-wide Benchmark of Quality (EC-BoQ; Fox et al., 2017), the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOt; Hemmeter et al., 2014), the School-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI; Algozzine et al., 2014), School-wide Implementation Review (SIR; Wisconsin Rtl Center, 2015), Tier 1 Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ; Kincaid et al., 2010), research developed rubric (Rubric; Cook et al., 2018)

## Case Studies

The following section describes some of the studies conducted to date.

**Fox, L., Strain, P. S., & Dunlap, G. (2021). Preventing the use of preschool suspension and expulsion: Implementing the pyramid model. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 65(4), 312-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1937026>***

This study examined discipline outcomes in two preschool programs serving predominantly Black and emerging bilingual children after implementation of early childhood PBIS with additional training and coaching on culturally responsive classroom practices, awareness of implicit bias and school exclusion, and use of disaggregated data to monitor discipline outcomes and intervention fidelity. Both programs received monthly on-site consultation on the use of data for decision-making, training on critical elements of the intervention, and behavioral training for families. Data showed improved social, emotional, and behavioral skill development for most children served in these programs. For instance, the program reported no behavioral incidents for 69% and 41% of children after 3 months of intervention, and of every child with more than one behavioral incident report at that time, ongoing data showed decreasing trends over time. Data also showed no use of suspension and expulsion during intervention.

**McIntosh, K., Ellwood, K., McCall, L., & Girvan, E. J. (2018). Using discipline data within a PBIS framework to enhance equity in school discipline. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 53(3), 146-152.***

This case study examined a K-8 school implementing PBIS but still experiencing disproportionate discipline. After identifying these disparities (ODR rates for Black students were moderate, whereas rates for White students were below the national median), the team examined their data to identify a vulnerable decision point in their data (teachers were more likely to issue ODRs to Black students for physical aggression on the playground). The team further examined ODRs and observations to find differences in perceived basketball rules as the main reason for disparities. Thus, the team agreed to clarify rules for students and staff, as well as provide opportunities to practice and acknowledge students for following the expected game rules in school. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of intervention efforts showed that ODRs rates for Black students dropped below the national median.

**Payno-Simmons, R. (2021). Centering equity and reducing discipline disproportionality in schools implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS): The Michigan equity pilot. *Preventing School Failure*, 65(4), 343-353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1937024>**

This case study examined the implementation of the Center's 5-Point Equity Approach and described efforts to address the overrepresentation of Black students in school discipline in one Midwest suburban middle school. By leveraging equity-focused technical assistance and existing PBIS systems (i.e., district-level coaching and data systems), in 3 years, this school strengthened running meetings to critically review disaggregated discipline data by race and ethnicity and engage in effective team-based problem solving. Equity-focused technical assistance provision included six professional development sessions for all staff on culturally responsive practices, identity, critical consciousness, and interrupting implicit bias through neutralizing routines. Consequently, discipline data showed incremental decreases in discipline disparities between Black and White students captured in referrals to the office, which went from 3.95 to 0.43 by the end of the 3-year pilot study.

**Swain-Bradway, J., Gulbrandson, K., Galston, A., & McIntosh, K. (2019). *Do Wisconsin schools implementing an integrated academic and behavior support framework improve equity in academic and school discipline outcomes?* Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org).**

This evaluation describes the Wisconsin RtI Center's implementation of a culturally responsive, data-driven, and equity-centered PBIS and schoolwide early reading model across 65 schools. Selected schools implemented multitiered systems of supports (MTSS) with adequate fidelity across behavior and reading for at least 2 of 3 years (2013-2016). Schools implementing MTSS with fidelity showed a substantial reduction of student suspension over time, especially for Black students and students receiving special education services. The intervention also increased academic achievement, with the largest gains for Black and Latino/a/e students, as well as students receiving special education. These changes also translated into gained time for administrative duties and instructional activities in the classroom.

## Single-Case Experimental Research

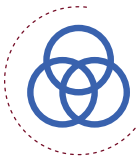
Cook, C. R., Doughty, M. T., Pullmann, M., McIntosh, K., McGinnis, J., Fiat, A. E., & Larson, M. F. (2018). Addressing discipline disparities for Black male students: Linking malleable root causes to feasible and effective practices. *School Psychology Review, 47*(2), 135-152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300717753831>

A concurrent multiple baseline single case study across three elementary schools examined the relation between a multi-component culturally responsive classroom intervention on the risk of Black students receiving ODRs. Teachers received ongoing coaching to implement proactive classroom management practices (e.g., greet students before class, teach behavioral expectations, reinforce behavior), a mindful technique to self-regulate in situations in which decisions are most vulnerable to implicit biases, and use of effective reactive strategies to respond to unexpected behavior (e.g., proximity control, increase emphatic and consistent teaching interactions, prompting desired behavior). Results from this study showed a systematic reduction of ODRs and improved self-reported connection with school for Black male students.

Gion, C., McIntosh, K., & Falcon, S. (2022). Effects of a multifaceted classroom intervention on racial disproportionality. *School Psychology Review, 51*(1), 67-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1788906>

Another concurrent multiple-baseline single-case study across four general education classrooms (Grades 4 to 7) in one urban district tested the effects of coaching with performance feedback on disparities and considering culture when defining and teaching appropriate classroom behaviors. This study showed that coaching of classroom teachers on equitable and culturally responsive practices (i.e., Personal Matrix; praise preference assessments) and performance feedback on instructional disparities can increase equity in the rates of acknowledgment and reprimands for Black students in comparison to their non-Black peers. Teachers showed immediate increases in praise and decreases in reprimands for Black students in comparison to their non-Black peers. Praise and reprimand ratios increased for non-Black students as well.



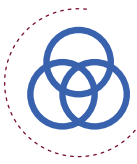


**Knochel, A. E., Blair, K. C., Kincaid, D., & Randazzo, A. (2022). Promoting equity in teachers' use of behavior-specific praise with self-monitoring and performance feedback. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 24(1), 17-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300720951939>**

This multiple-baseline single case design study evaluated the effects of self-monitoring and written performance feedback with and without a focus on equity in teacher delivery of behavior specific praise and reprimands and their perception of student behavior in four elementary classrooms. This study shows that self-monitoring and performance feedback positively changed teachers' overall rates of praise and reprimands; however, equitable rates of praise and reprimands across racially diverse students required equity-focused feedback. This study was unique in that teachers were provided equity-focused performance feedback in a way that did not explicitly note the equity focus of the intervention; instead, feedback helped them become aware of which students need more equitable praise and discipline responses.

**Muldrew, A. C., & Miller, F. G. (2021). Examining the effects of the personal matrix activity with diverse students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 58(3), 515-533. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22461>**

This single-case research study assessed the effects of a classroom activity known as the Personal Matrix (Levenson et al., 2021) on the behavior of culturally and linguistically diverse students, as reported by teachers across four elementary classrooms. Results showed increased teacher ratings of respectful behaviors and decreased ratings of disrespectful behavior after implementation of the Personal Matrix.



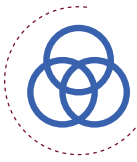
## Quasi-experimental and Experimental Group Design Studies

Bradshaw, C. P., Pas, E. T., Bottiani, J. H., Debnam, K. J., Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., & Rosenberg, M. S. (2018). Promoting Cultural Responsivity And Student Engagement Through Double Check Coaching Of Classroom Teachers: An Efficacy Study. *School Psychology Review, 47*(2), 118-134. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0119.V47-2>

This randomized controlled trial examined the effects of the Double Check model, which builds on Tier 1 PBIS by providing professional development focused on culturally responsive practices and an intervention consisting of one-on-one coaching of classroom teachers. The model was tested in a sample of 158 elementary and middle school teachers, with a particular interest in examining the impacts of the coaching, over and above the effects of the Tier 1 supports and professional development. Although relative effect sizes were small, results showed a reduction of ODRs for Black students and improved teacher self-reported use of culturally responsive behavior management and efficacy for educators who received the Double Check coaching. In addition, trained external observers recorded significantly more proactive behavior management and anticipation of student problems by teachers, higher student cooperation, less student noncooperation, and fewer disruptive behaviors in classrooms led by coached teachers relative to comparison teachers.

McIntosh, K., Girvan, E. J., Fairbanks Falcon, S., McDaniel, S. C., Smolkowski, K., Bastable, E., Santiago-Rosario, M. R., Izzard, S., Austin, S. C., Nese, R. N. T., & Baldy, T. S. (2021). An equity-focused PBIS approach reduces racial inequities in school discipline: A randomized controlled trial. *School Psychology, 36*(6), 433-444. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000466>

This study was a randomized controlled trial of a 1-year professional development series based on the equity-centered approach known as ReACT (Racial equity through Assessing data for vulnerable decision points, Culturally responsive behavior strategies, and Teaching about implicit bias and strategies to neutralize it). In ReACT, a trainer leads school personnel through a process of learning about implicit bias, examining their discipline data, and implementing a plan designed to address their specific patterns of inequities. Eight elementary schools participated, with four randomized to receive intervention. Results showed statistically significant decreases in racial inequities in school discipline for Black students, as well as decreases in school discipline for non-Black students.



McIntosh, K., Girvan, E. J., McDaniel, S. C., Santiago-Rosario, M. R., St. Joseph, S., Fairbanks Falcon, S., Izzard, S., & Bastable, E. (2021). Effects of an equity-focused PBIS approach to school improvement on exclusionary discipline and school climate. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 65(4), 354-361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1937027>

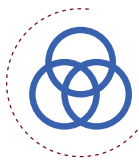
In a separate study of ReACT, the authors conducted a pre-post quasi-experimental study as part of a state turnaround initiative. A total of 25 schools identified by the state for intensive school reform received ReACT in a series of full-day workshops throughout the year, and results were assessed in change in outcomes from the previous year. These schools, which had predominantly Black student enrollments, had significantly decreased rates of exclusionary discipline (including office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions) and significantly improved school climate (as measured by student, family, and school personnel surveys), in comparison to turnaround schools not receiving ReACT and schools not identified for turnaround support.

## Recommendations for Practice

These studies provide evidence that interventions leveraging components of the Center on PBIS's 5-Point Equity Approach (such as providing support to school teams to disaggregate ODRs by race and ethnicity, making classroom PBIS practices more culturally responsive, and teaching about implicit bias in discipline decision making and how to neutralize it) can be powerful mechanisms for increasing equity in school discipline. However, it is important for teams to monitor the effects of interventions based on this approach instead of implementing and assuming they will be effective in increasing equity. Moreover, this work should be considered part of a sustained effort over time and not a set of one-time events. To get started with planning and implementation efforts, leadership teams can use their existing PBIS frameworks and free resources from the Center to infuse equity across the core elements of multi-tiered systems of support: (a) outcomes, (b) data, (c) systems, and (d) practices.

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## Embedded Hyperlinks

1. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/do-schools-implementing-swpbis-have-decreased-racial-and-ethnic-disproportionality-in-school-discipline>
2. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-5-point-intervention-approach-for-enhancing-equity-in-school-discipline>
3. [www.pbis.org/topics/equity](http://www.pbis.org/topics/equity)
4. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/using-discipline-data-within-swpbis-to-identify-and-address-disproportionality-a-guide-for-school-teams>
5. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches>
6. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/examples-of-engaging-instruction-to-increase-equity-in-education>
7. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/key-elements-of-policies-to-address-discipline-disproportionality-a-guide-for-district-and-school-teams>
8. <https://www.pbis.org/resource-type/presentations#equity>
9. <https://www.pbis.org/video-examples/video#equity>
10. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/do-wisconsin-schools-implementing-an-integrated-academic-and-behavior-support-framework-improve-equity-in-academic-and-school-discipline-outcomes>

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