

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION SUPPORT TEAM (BIST) MIDDLE SCHOOL 2008 EVALUATION REPORT



Prepared for:
Ozanam

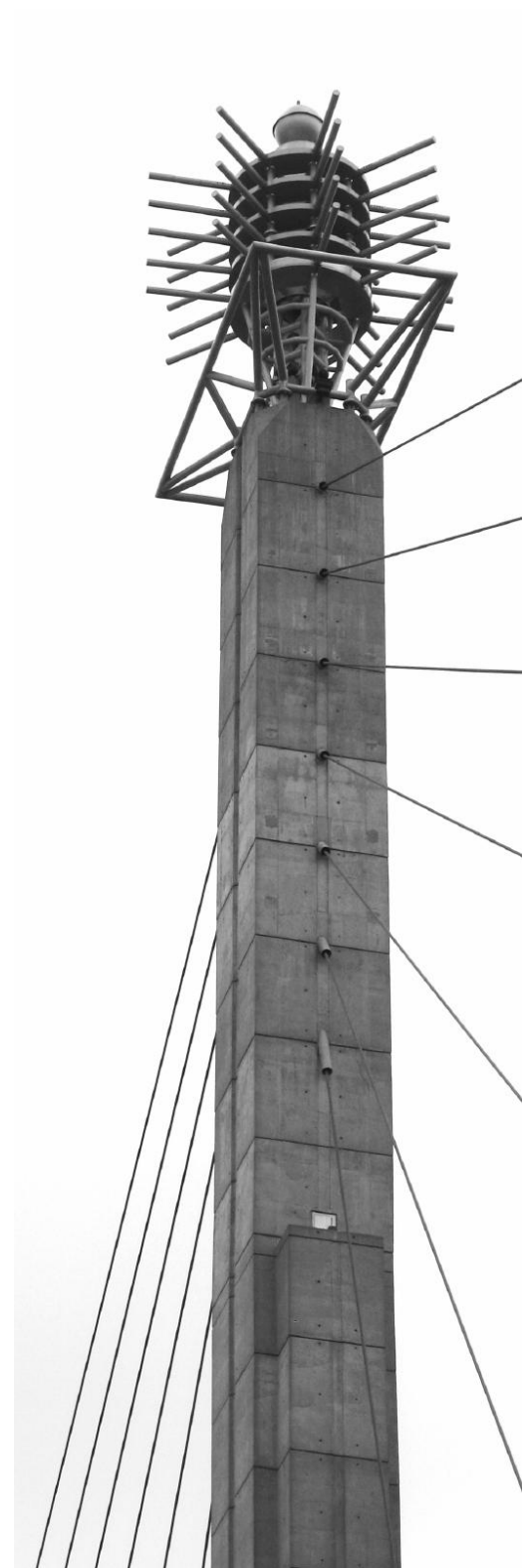
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Kansas City's Leader for Evaluation, Research, and Consultation

Picture: One of Bartle Hall's art deco pylons, an unmistakable fixture in the Kansas City skyline.

Contents

- INTRODUCTION 4
- PROGRAM 4
- METHODOLOGY 6
 - Participants 6
 - Dependent Measures 7
- IMPLEMENTATION 8
- RESULTS 9
- DISCUSSION 11
 - Limitations 14
 - Future Evaluations 14
- References 15
- Appendix: A 16

Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) 2008 Middle School Evaluation Report

INTRODUCTION

In April 2008, Ozanam contracted with the Resource Development Institute (RDI) to provide evaluation services and analyze five years of evaluation data from a middle school which had implemented the Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) program on a school-wide basis.

PROGRAM

Programs directed at positively altering the school and classroom environment seek to reduce or eliminate problem behaviors by changing the overall context in which they occur. Such programs are closely linked to social organization theory, and work from the premise that all aspects of school life can affect violence and substance abuse (Sherman et al., 1998). According to Gottfredson (1998), programs aimed at clarifying and communicating norms about behaviors are effective ways to reduce crime, delinquency, and substance abuse. Instructional approaches that combine social and thinking skills have been shown to be effective in enhancing students' abilities, attitudes, and behaviors inconsistent with substance abuse and other kinds of delinquent behavior (Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies, 1999). Programs directed at classroom organization, management, and instructional strategies attempt to enhance the protective factors that promote opportunities for active participation in learning, skills to establish positive social relationships, and bonding to school and pro-social peers (OJJDP, 2008).

The Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) program is well-grounded in behavioral theory (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005) and combines strengths-based and resiliency principles

(Benard, 2004) within the context of the ecological, person-in-environment model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). BIST strategies are person-centered and based on the core conditions of congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1986).

The BIST program simultaneously engages school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in a proactive/preventative, problem-solving school discipline plan, designed to teach social and behavioral skills, enhancing the academic and social growth of students. This ecological approach requires the skills necessary to engage issues at all levels, in multiple modalities, and in a collaborative way (Gutierrez, Yeakly, & Ortega, 2000).

The BIST model provides a multi-level approach which includes the establishment of universal prevention elements such as: clarifying expectations for faculty members; establishing clear and consistent rules; teaching expectations to all students; enhancing student social and problem-solving skills; affording students the opportunity to practice expectations; and reinforcing appropriate behavior. BIST provides secondary and tertiary levels of support through an array of progressively intense levels of assessment and interventions, matched to the types of skill deficits exhibited and identified needs, for students who require more teaching and practice to develop social and behavioral skills. This multi-level approach parallels several other proactive discipline models (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker, 2000).

A primary feature distinguishing the BIST program from other proactive discipline plans is that BIST does not solely provide teacher training workshops. A key element of the model is the establishment of an ongoing partnership between school personnel and BIST consultants who meet monthly with school personnel in a collaborative problem-solving capacity, in support of their ongoing professional development. BIST also provides on-going phone and email support as well as personal consulting if a teacher feels a student is in crisis. As part of that professional

development, staff members are also taught how to collect and utilize data on an ongoing basis for effective decision-making regarding the social skills and behavior instruction in their classroom and school.

METHODOLOGY

A secondary analysis of office referral data collected prior to, and throughout a five academic year period was conducted. In addition, the evaluator conducted qualitative interviews with school administration, school staff members, and outside BIST consultants. Finally, the evaluator observed a series of consultation sessions between the school's BIST teams and BIST consultant.

Participants

The setting for the study was a public, central city middle school (grades 6-8) located in a Midwestern city having a population of less than 250,000. The participants included the entire student, teacher, and administrative population of the school during five consecutive academic years (2003-2008). Since all teachers and administrators received the BIST training, and the entire student body was involved in the implementation of the BIST program, comparison groups of students, teachers, and administrators from each of the two years prior to implementation were used as comparison groups.

The overall enrollment of the school decreased during the time of the study from 869 students in 2002-2003 to 651 students in 2007-2008. The student body also became more diverse during the five years, with the percentage of White, non-Hispanic students dropping from 81.0 percent of the student population in 2002-2003 to 65.8 percent of the student population in 2007-2008 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Student Participants by Academic Year

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
White, non-Hispanic	687 (83.7%)	704 (81.0%)	536 (74.0%)	490 (69.3%)	508 (70.4%)	471 (68.5%)	439 (65.8%)
Black, non-Hispanic	45 (5.5%)	59 (6.8%)	76 (10.5%)	76 (10.8%)	73 (10.1%)	71 (10.3%)	78 (11.7%)
Hispanic	27 (3.2%)	40 (4.6%)	51 (7.0%)	79 (11.1%)	68 (9.4%)	74 (10.8%)	77 (11.5%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	45 (5.5%)	48 (5.5%)	50 (7.0%)	53 (7.5%)	63 (8.7%)	61 (8.9%)	62 (9.3%)
American Indian /Alaska Native	17 (2.1%)	18 (2.1%)	11 (1.5%)	9 (1.3%)	10 (1.4%)	11 (1.6%)	11 (1.6%)
Free and Reduced Lunch		284 (32.7%)	322 (44.5%)	328 (46.4%)	350 (48.5%)	332 (48.3%)	382 (57.3%)
English Language Learners		19 (6.6%)	62 (8.6%)	84 (11.9%)	80 (11.1%)	100 (14.5%)	106 (15.9%)
Total	821	869	724	707	722	688	667

*Data is from the 2007-2008 State of the Schools Report

In addition to the school becoming more diverse, the percentage of students qualified for free and reduced lunches increased from 32.7 percent in 2002-2003 to 57.3 percent in 2007-2008, and the percentage of English Language Learners increased from 6.6 percent in 2002-2003 to 15.9 percent in 2007-2008.

Dependent Measures

The primary dependent measure for the study was the number of office discipline referrals (ODR's) issued each academic year. Office discipline referrals were issued by teachers for disruptive behaviors which rose to the level of being a safety issue or included threats or violence. Research has shown that natural resources such as the number of office discipline referrals is an efficient evaluation measure of school climate and the functioning of the school-wide discipline system (Irvin, Horner, Ingram, Todd, Sugai, Sampson, & Boland, 2006; Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004).

IMPLEMENTATION

The BIST program was initiated at the request of teachers and administrators who were concerned about improving student discipline, setting policies that would become standard practice within the school community, and using strategies that had a positive focus. The primary objective was to reduce the number of school discipline referrals by creating a positive learning environment that encouraged and reinforced academic participation, adherence to school rules, and display of pro-social skills among the student population.

During the 2002-2003 school year school administration adopted a school-wide student discipline plan using the BIST model. Faculty and administration were trained in the BIST model, and attended a week-long workshop during the summer. Through the course of the five years of implementation, all new administration and faculty members were also required to complete the BIST training which was provided in subsequent years either during the summer, or during the first weeks of the fall semester (when someone was hired after the summer workshops had been completed). Administration and faculty members who had previously attended a BIST workshop were also given the opportunity to attend ongoing workshops to enhance their understanding and skills in the implementation of the BIST model.

The school-wide BIST plan was initially implemented at the start of the 2003 fall semester. School administration established a BIST leadership team comprised of faculty and administration which reviewed, revised and established policies; clarified definitions and categories for ODR's; and established procedures for implementing the BIST program. In subsequent years, BIST teams comprised of faculty who taught the same students were established for each grade level (a total of 2 teams per grade level) with individual faculty members from the initial leadership team taking the lead role in each of the BIST teams. These

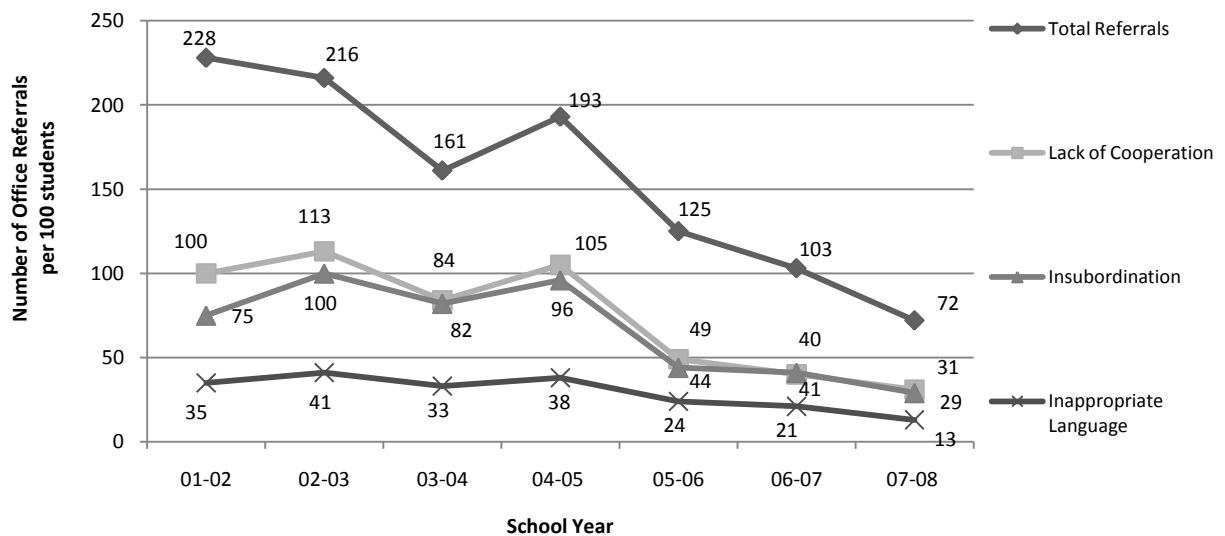
BIST teams met on a weekly basis to discuss effective decision-making regarding the social and behavioral skills and behavior instruction in their classroom and school; to coordinate all elements of the program; and to ensure that all faculty and staff were adhering to the fidelity of the plan. They used a variety of program tracking data to determine when a student reached the threshold calling for an individual plan, monitor the student's progress in developing the identified deficit skills, and brainstorm solutions for situations requiring more intensive interventions. They also met once a month with an outside BIST consultant as part of their professional development in the use of the BIST methodologies and to further ensure adherence to fidelity to the program. See appendix A for a copy of the fidelity measures BIST consultants used in their discussions with faculty and administration.

RESULTS

Raw numbers for office discipline referrals (ODR's) were converted to number per one hundred students. Figure 1 presents the numbers of ODR's recorded (per 100 students) for the two years prior to the implementation of the BIST program, and the five academic years of the study. It also presents the number of ODR's (per 100 students) for three of the behavior categories during the same time period. The data document a decrease in the frequency of ODR's in each year that the school-wide program was in effect, with the exception of the second academic year. The numbers of ODR's per one hundred students for the two comparison groups (years prior to the implementation of the program) were 228 and 216 respectively. At the end of the study period, the number of ODR's had dropped to 72 per one hundred students, which was equivalent to less than one third of either of the two comparison groups (31.6% and 33.3% respectively). The same decreasing trend was reflected in the numbers of office referrals per one hundred students

for the category of lack of cooperation (100 and 113 for the comparison groups prior to implementation, and 31 at the end of the study), insubordination (75 and 100 prior to the comparison groups to implementation and 29 at the end of the study); and inappropriate language (35 and 41 for the comparison groups prior to implementation and 13 at the end of the study).

Figure 1: Office Referrals per One hundred Students



As indicated by the data in Figure 1, in the second year of the program, the frequency of referrals to the office increased after an initial drop during the first year. The school principal reported that he felt the excitement and “newness” of the approach had worn off in the second year, and that staff members were relaxing their diligence in maintaining a consistent application of the BIST methodologies (fidelity to the program) in the second year. His response was to work with the BIST consultants and BIST team members to review the circumstances leading to all the ODR’s during the second year and determine which could have been addressed within the context of the BIST model rather than being referred to the office. Staff and administration members were also provided the opportunity to attend the BIST workshop a second time during the following summer. The principal reported that going through the training a second time provided him and

some of his teachers the opportunity to bring their experiences from the previous year into the learning and discussion process, and provided them with a new perspective into the application of the BIST methodologies. He reported that they returned the next year with a stronger commitment and more in-depth understanding of the BIST philosophy.

Both the principal and staff members that were interviewed noted the importance of having an outside consultant working with the BIST teams on an ongoing basis. They indicated that learning to implement the program takes time, practice, and the regular opportunities for collaborative discussion of student concerns and barriers to implementation as they arise. They felt the outside consultant was able to establish a collaborative relationship with staff and teachers which facilitated their openness and allowed them to grow professionally in a way that would have been inhibited had the principal or another senior administrator tried to fill that role, due to the inherent hierarchical, supervisory relationship between administration and faculty.

In an interview with the school principal, he noted, “Before we could focus on improving the academic performance of our students, we had to have control of our classrooms and school.” He continued by saying, “We feel that it (the BIST program) has changed the climate of our building and contributes to an atmosphere that supports student learning.”

DISCUSSION

The implementation of effective student discipline practices is a dominant concern of public administrators and educational personnel. Once school-wide behavior support programs have been established, it is critical that their efficacy be demonstrated and maintained long-term. The longitudinal evaluation described in this report involved a 5-year period at a public, central city middle school (grades 6-8) located in a Midwestern city having a population of less than

250,000. The evaluation revealed a reduction in office discipline referrals. Classroom behaviors were dealt with by the teachers resulting in students being able to stay in the classroom more often than the previous classroom management process. Serious rule violations which threatened the safety of students or included threats continued to be referred to the office.

The overall results of the evaluation suggests that the positive effects from implementing the BIST model on a school-wide scale can not only be sustained over multiple academic years but appear to be cumulative. The fluctuation in results which occurred in the second year also suggests that in some instances the full implementation of the program can require renewed commitment to adhere to the fidelity of the program. It also may support the principal's perception that going through the summer BIST training a second time provided faculty and staff with a new perspective into the application of the BIST methodologies based on being able to bring experiences from the previous year into the learning and discussion process.

The primary data for this evaluation were the number of student office discipline referrals (ODR's) issued at all grade levels. This measure, of course, is not as precise as data generated from direct classroom observations but reflects the incorporation of natural sources as an index to evaluate the usefulness of school discipline programs. The recording of ODR's in the two years prior to the whole-school implementation of the BIST program, did provide ample data from both the comparison groups for the evaluation.

No data was collected or analyzed in this evaluation that would support any causal relationship between implementing the BIST model and the subsequent academic performance of the school's students. But, as noted above, the school principal indicated that he felt the school could not focus on improving the academic performance of their students until they had "control of our classrooms and school." He indicated that the BIST program had "changed the climate of

our building and contributes to an atmosphere that supports student learning.” While academic performance is dependent on a multitude of factors and was not the focus of this evaluation, it can be noted that the core principles of the BIST model compliment the Professional Learning Community model which the school implemented shortly after implementing the BIST model. Figure 2 and Table 2 below present the Overall Performance Percentages for all students—meeting or exceeding Federal standards in 8th grade in reading, writing, and math during the academic years of the evaluation.

Figure 2: Performance % for all students— Meeting or exceeding standards in 8th grade.

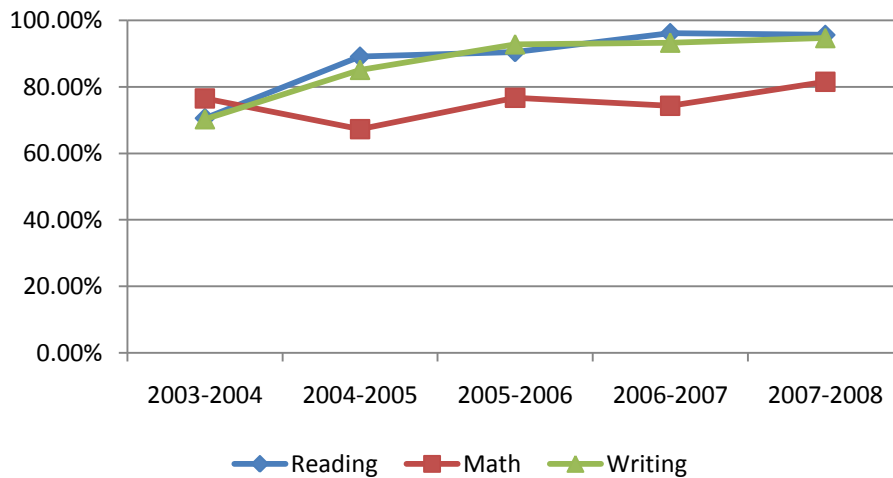


Table 2: Performance % for all students— Meeting or exceeding standards in 8th grade

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	Change
Reading	70.55%	89.05%	90.44%	96.11%	95.59%	+ 25.04
Math	76.49%	67.26%	76.70%	74.26%	81.50%	+ 5.01
Writing	70.27%	85.09%	92.76%	93.27%	94.64%	+ 24.37

2007-2008 State of the Schools Report

While no causal relationship can be implied between BIST and the improvement in academic performance results, it would be worth exploring whether similar performance trends exist in other settings where BIST is implemented.

Limitations

It should be noted that the reliability of recording student office referrals and the procedural fidelity of teachers implementing the behavior support program were not systematically assessed beyond being one of the routine topics discussed during BIST team meetings. These shortcomings stemmed from the fact that this evaluation was conducted retrospectively and not planned as a formal research study.

Another limitation on the evaluation is that the aggregate data do not differentiate students who had infrequent discipline problems from those with more high-rate and chronic difficulties. Neither did it differentiate students who were members of identified at-risk groups based on race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, or disability.

Future Evaluations

It is recommended that additional evaluations of the BIST program be conducted in other school districts, and at the elementary and secondary school levels in addition to middle schools, to determine whether or not similar results will occur in different settings. It is also recommended that additional evaluations be designed and conducted that would facilitate a comparative analyses based on at-risk status and chronic versus infrequent discipline problems.

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Appendix: A

BIST Fidelity Checklist

School name: _____ City: _____ State: _____

	Almost Never	About 25% of the time	About 50% of the time	About 75% of the time	Almost always
Faculty/staff consistently utilize each step of the BIST Continuum when responding to student discipline issues.					
When processing with the student, faculty/staff consistently connect events to the missing skill and building standard.					
Following a classroom observation, the BIST consultant is able to provide immediate feedback to the classroom teachers.					
Student plans are reviewed regularly and altered if the impact has decreased.					
Faculty/staff utilize early intervention through daily triage and providing one redirect.					
Students are sent home consistently when unable to partner and meet the standard in the office.					
Teacher support team is utilized in a productive manner by staff (i.e.: CARE, SST, etc.)					
Faculty/staff process and hold students accountable by asking students questions instead of telling them the problem.					
Faculty/staff are prevention-based with students (build in visits for exercise, triage, and consider the impact of triage, etc.)					
When there is a problem, staff is able to talk about it in a productive and effective manner.					
Faculty/staff engage in effective communication to facilitate consistent maintenance of the building standard.					
Faculty/staff utilize effective time management to resolve problems and issues.					
Faculty/staff receive adequate support to manage problems and issues.					