MayInstitute
SHAPING FUTURES. CHANGING LIVES.

REDUCING DISPROPORTIONATE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE WITH EQUITY-FOCUSED PBIS

Nationally, Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately represented in school discipline, and male students are disproportionately represented in school-related arrests.[1] Behavioral support systems must be addressed to eliminate discipline disproportionality for these students.

THE NEED FOR EQUITY-FOCUSED PBIS

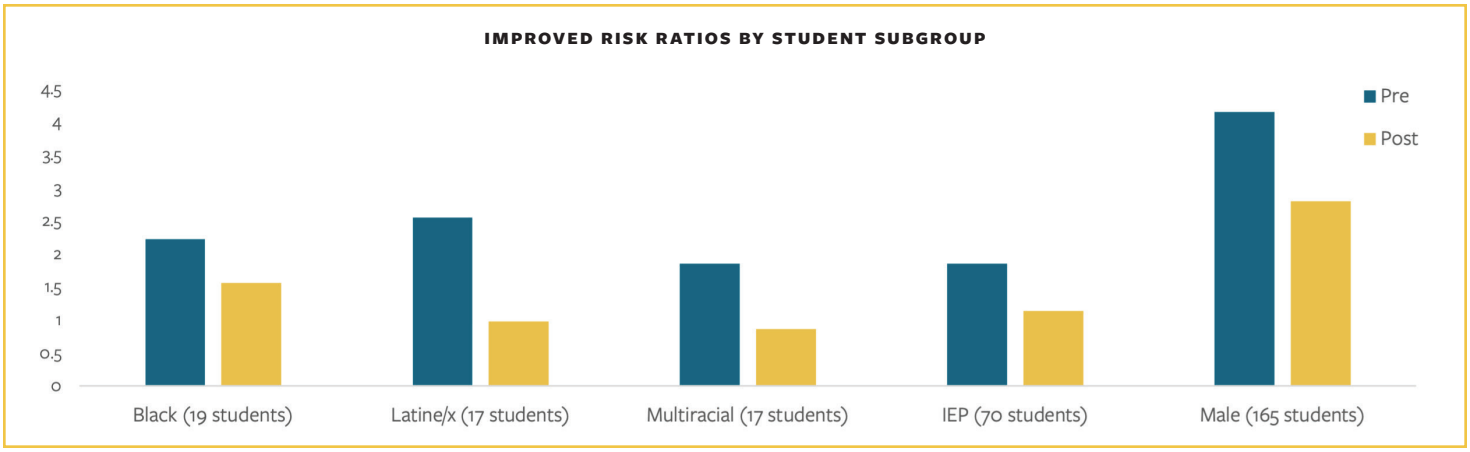
Schools implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) *with fidelity* show reduced overall use of office discipline referrals (ODRs) and exclusionary discipline,[2] improved school climate[3] and academic achievement,[4] and lower discipline disproportionality for racially minoritized students.[5] In spite of the numerous positive outcomes, **disparities continued to exist** for racially minoritized students[5] and students with disabilities.[6] Further, male students may continue to be overrepresented in school discipline even when PBIS is implemented *with fidelity*.[7] These findings indicated a need for equity-focused PBIS.

IMPACT OF EQUITY-FOCUSED PBIS

Several studies on equity-focused PBIS, including a randomized control trial,[8] the gold standard for research, have shown enhanced positive outcomes. Moreover, a school in Massachusetts that recently implemented equity-focused PBIS exhibited lower racial disproportionality in school discipline.[9] The 5-point intervention[10] is research-based and includes the strategies most likely to reduce discipline disproportionality. Strategies are implemented based on the needs of the school.

An elementary school that was implementing PBIS *with fidelity* was concerned with discipline disproportionality identified in ODRs. Implementation of equity-focused PBIS consisted of reviewing disproportionality in the school's ODR data with the PBIS team and three staff trainings, each with an opportunity for follow-up coaching: 1] strengthen the data system (i.e., SWIS refresher, practice using behavior definitions and responding flowchart); 2] contextually inappropriate behavior (i.e., Staff Culture of Elements activity, train on vulnerable decision points and Personal Matrix activity); 3] increase positive student-teacher relationships (e.g., Greetings at the Door, praise preference assessment).

ODR risk ratios show the likelihood that students within a subgroup receive at least one ODR compared to all other students. An ideal risk ratio is 1, meaning students from that subgroup are neither over-identified nor under-identified. The graphs below display risk ratios for students after the implementation of equity-focused PBIS. Across the 2023–2024 school year, risk ratios improved for Black students by 30%, Latine/x students by 62%, and multiracial students by 54%. Risk ratios improved for students with IEPs by 38% and for male students by 33%.



[Over]

1] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2023, November). *Student Discipline in School Climate in U.S. Public Schools*. https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov

2] Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Examining the effects of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on student outcomes: Results from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12*, 133-148.

3] Elrod, B. G., Rice, K. G., & Meyers, J. (2022). PBIS fidelity, school climate, and student discipline: A longitudinal study of secondary schools. *Psychology in the Schools, 59*(2), 376-397.

4] Luiselli, J. K., Putnam, R. F., Handler, M. W., & Feinberg, A. B. (2005). Whole school positive behaviour support: effects on student discipline problems and academic performance. *Educational Psychology, 25*(2-3), 183-198.

5] McIntosh, K., Gion, C., & Bastable, E. (2018). Do schools implementing SWPBIS have decreased racial disproportionality in school discipline? OSEP TA Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

6] Simonsen, B., Freeman, J., Gambino, A. J., Sears, S., Meyer, K., & Hoselton, R. (2022). An exploration of the relationship between PBIS and discipline outcomes for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 43*(5), 287-300.

7] Zakszeski, B., Rutherford, L., Heidelburg, K., & Thomas, L. (2021). In pursuit of equity: Discipline disproportionality and SWPBIS implementation in urban schools. *School Psychology, 36*(2), 122.

8] 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

9] May Institute. (2024). Equity-Focused PBIS Improves Disproportionality in Discipline. https://mayinstitute.cdn.neptuneweb.com/pdfs/NEW%20pdfs/NEW-PBIS-Equity-brief_5-22-24FINAL.pdf

10] McIntosh, K., Girvan, E. J., Horner, R. H., Smolkowski, K., & Sugai, G. (2018). A 5-point intervention approach for enhancing equity in school discipline. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-5-point-intervention-approach-for-enhancing-equity-in-school-discipline

For more information, contact Dr. Chelsea Salvatore, Postdoctoral Fellow, May Institute at csalvatore@mayinstitute.org or Dr. Robert Putnam, Executive Vice President of PBIS and Consultation, May Institute at bputnam@mayinstitute.org or 617.365.6756.

May Institute is a nonprofit organization that is a national leader in the field of applied behavior analysis and evidence-based interventions, serving autistic individuals and individuals with other developmental disabilities, brain injury, neurobehavioral disorders, and other special needs. Founded nearly 70 years ago, we provide a wide range of exceptional educational and rehabilitative services across the lifespan.

For more than 20 years, May Institute has been a national partner to the National Technical Assistance Center for PBIS. The Center has been funded by the U.S. Department of Education for the last 25 years to research and effectively disseminate the systems, data, and practices that are critically important in the implementation of MTSS/PBIS.

MayInstitute
SHAPING FUTURES. CHANGING LIVES.