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Effective Behavior and Instructional Support

A District Model for Early Identification and Prevention of Reading and Behavior Problems

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The purpose of this article is to describe the development and 10-year implementation of the effective behavior and instructional support model in a midsized northwestern Oregon school district. The district experienced a sustained reduction in students' discipline referral rates, an increase in the percentage of students on track for early reading benchmarks, and an improvement in special education evaluation of learning disabilities. These important outcomes were associated with the systematic integration of effective practices, including capacity building professional development, schoolwide positive behavior support, early literacy, early intervention, and special education evaluation and identification using student responsiveness to intervention. At school and district levels, a continuum of behavior and academic supports was established for all students, and specialized interventions were implemented for students struggling with behavior and/or academic challenges.

Keywords: *behavior and instructional support; early screening and identification; school and district systems; responsiveness to intervention*

Schools across the country are accountable for improved student outcomes related to a growing number of local and national initiatives (e.g., literacy, numeracy, special education, safe schools, character education, and vocational and postsecondary transitions). However, with shrinking resources, schools struggle to achieve outcomes with practices and systems that are effective, efficient, and durable. Fortunately, more than two decades of research is available to help educators understand the nature of behavioral and academic challenges in schools and the essential features of an effective school-based response (Good & Kaminski, 1996; Horner & Sugai, 2002; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Moats, 1999; National Reading Panel, 2000; Shaywitz, 2004; Simmons et al., 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Walker, Irvin & Sprague, 1997). Additionally, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and legislation of No Child Left Behind give schools incentives and resources to improve instructional and behavioral support for all children.

In the context of instructional supports, much attention has focused on early literacy. More than three decades of research documents the importance of teaching all

children to read (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002; Carnine, Silbert, & Kame'enui, 1997; Good & Kaminski, 1996; Hallahan & Mercer, 2002; Hurford et al., 1993; National Reading Panel, 2000; Simmons et al., 2000; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). Longitudinal studies reported by the National Reading Panel (2000) indicated that more than 17.5% of the nation's children (about 10 million) encounter reading problems in the crucial first 3 years of their schooling. Juel (1988) found that if students

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were poor readers in first grade, they were highly likely (88% probability) to be poor readers in fourth grade. Other studies have shown that approximately 75% of students identified with reading problems in the third grade continue to have severe reading disabilities in the ninth grade (Shapiro, 2004).

Because phonological awareness and word-level reading skills (Good, Simmons, & Smith, 1998; Jenkins & O'Connor, 2002; Kaminski & Good, 1996) are so critical to learning to read, early identification and prevention of reading difficulties are particularly important (Jenkins & O'Connor, 2002; Kaminski & Good, 1998; Lyon et al., 2001). As a result, acceptance of early screening procedures, small-group instruction in early literacy skills, and ongoing progress measurement has increased among educators as "sensible actions" (Jenkins & O'Connor, 2002, p. 117). Differentiating instruction for students who have reading "disabilities" from those who are experiencing "difficulties" acquiring initial skills is particularly important to ensure that appropriate instructional decisions are made.

In the context of behavior supports, attention has evolved from tactics of behavior and classroom management to systems of comprehensive and evidence-based practices that emphasize prevention, teaching, and reinforcement (Carr et al., 2002; Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, et al., 2000). This approach, schoolwide positive behavior support (SWPBS), is grounded in behavioral theory, specifically, applied behavior analysis, and emphasizes a continuum of behavior supports for all students within a three-tiered prevention logic used by public health, school-based mental health, and medicine (Kutash, Duchnowski, & Lynn, 2006). The SWPBS logic emphasizes the prevention of problem behavior, use of empirically supported behavioral interventions, application of local data-based decision making, establishment of local implementation capacity, conducting of outcome-based evaluation, and use of continuous professional development (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1999, 2006).

Common to both instructional and behavioral support contexts is an emphasis on a performance or data-based approach to instructional decision making, which also attempts to improve on traditional discrepancy and exclusionary methods of identifying students for specialized supports. This approach is referred to as "responsiveness to intervention" (RtI) and has the following general features: (a) universal screening, (b) continuous progress monitoring, (c) evidence-based practices, (d) fidelity of intervention implementation, (e) student

performance as progress indicator, and (f) data-based decision making (Burns, 2007; Kame'enui, 2007; Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007).

The adoption of an RtI approach highlights the interconnectedness between academic and social behavior outcomes and instruction. In their review, Putnam, Horner, and Algozzine (2006) noted that school- and classroomwide use of positive behavior supports appear to be related to increased time and engagement in instruction, which, in turn, are known to relate to improved achievement. McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, and Good (2006) found that fourth-grade office discipline referrals (ODRs) and low scores on the Phoneme Segmentation Fluency measure of the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS; Kaminsky & Good, 1996) given in the spring of the student's kindergarten year among the most powerful overall predictors of discipline referrals for fifth-grade students.

The overall picture provided by McIntosh's results is one in which children enter kindergarten with varying reading skills. If, however, they do not respond to literacy instruction during kindergarten, and fall behind, a negative spiral of achievement and behavior becomes more likely. As the student's literacy skills do not keep pace with those of peers, academic tasks become more aversive, and problem behaviors that lead to escape from these tasks become more likely. (Putnam et al., 2006, p. 1)

The purpose of this article is to describe the background, conceptual framework, implementation features, and outcomes associated with a 10-year effort to establish a comprehensive districtwide approach to instructional and social behavior support in which the integration of early literacy, RtI, and SWPBS was emphasized.

Background and Effective Behavior and Instructional Support (EBIS) Implementation Features

The district is located just south of Portland, Oregon, and serves several suburban communities with a combined population of approximately 67,000. The district has about 12,000 students in 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, and one comprehensive middle and high school alternative program. Initially, the project was implemented in 9 of the district's 10 elementary schools. The 10th and new school entered the project upon opening its doors in 2005–2006.

Approximately 10% of the district's students were eligible for special education services in 2005–2006. Hispanic and/or Latino students represented the fastest

growing group in the district, and English language learners composed about 15% of the district's enrollment. In addition, half of the district's elementary schools received Title 1 funding, with 35% to 60% of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Mobility rates typically ranged from very high to very low across the district's schools.

As student enrollments began to increase in 1996, the district experienced an increase in student discipline problems. The response was to adopt a districtwide implementation of SWPBS known at the time as effective behavior support (EBS; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sadler, 2000a). The district's EBS implementation included the establishment of a continuum of behavior support that emphasized (a) all students and staff members across all school settings, (b) teaching and encouraging prosocial student behaviors, (c) school-based leadership teams, (d) systemic district-level supports and resources, and (e) regular collection and use of student and school data for ongoing evaluation.

From 1996 to 1999, the district's EBS program progressed from a pilot study involving eight schools to a school board-approved districtwide adoption. A district coordinator was appointed to develop and implement a full calendar of alternating monthly leadership team meetings, team-training, behavioral capacity building, and school support activities for accurate and sustained implementation. Training and support were focused on proactive school discipline, classroom management, social and problem-solving skills instruction, functional assessment, and behavior intervention planning. The coordinator regularly attended school team meetings to monitor, prompt, and encourage implementation of action plan activities and to assist teams to collect, use, and analyze school and student data for monthly decision making.

In January 2001, a proposal to integrate early reading and special education evaluation using RtI into the district's EBS model was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, one of six similar projects nationally. The Effective Behavior and Instructional Support Project expanded the scope of the school's EBS teams to include responsibilities for both behavior and academic achievement, particularly in early reading. During the initial stages of EBIS implementation, a district team reconfigured organizational structures and coordination activities to assist nine schools in the establishment of school leadership teams, evaluation of existing literacy programs and supports, and development of integrated behavior and reading action plans. School teams were expanded from the typical EBS structure (i.e., principal, counselor, and certified and classified staff) to include representation from K–5

classrooms, special education, Title 1, and English language learner programs.

In spring 2001, the district's special education director and the EBIS Early Literacy coordinator charged a task force to develop guidelines for grouping, monitoring, and adjusting interventions for students whose progress trajectory in the general education curriculum suggested a need for special education services. The work of this task force formalized the district's shift to a problem-solving model featuring RtI for learning disabilities evaluation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Gresham, 2002; Lyon et al., 2001). To determine the appropriateness ("treatment validity") of a referral for special education evaluation, teams had to affirm the following:

1. The regular classroom produces acceptable growth for (most) students and thus is a generally nurturing environment,
2. Important *dual discrepancies* in performance level and growth rate exist between a target child and classroom peers,
3. Inadequate individual learning occurs even with general education adaptations, and/or
4. Improved growth can only be derived with the provision of a (highly intensive) *special* [italics added] education. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998, p. 207)

Teams established dual discrepancy by documenting that given a series of well-implemented and research- or evidence-based interventions, a student continued to show both low achievement and slow progress relative to peers.

In the following section, brief descriptions of key features of the EBIS process are described: (a) teacher teamwork and integrated service delivery; (b) instructional data collection, rules, and high-stakes decisions; (c) research- and evidence-based practices; (d) systems for information management and data-based action planning; and (e) principal and teacher involvement and leadership.

Teacher Teamwork and Integrated Service Delivery

To maximize teacher time and resources, each elementary school reviewed and reorganized existing school teams into EBIS leadership teams that had clearly defined purposes, operating procedures, and instructional-behavioral practices. These teams were organized to represent service delivery along the entire continuum of instructional and behavioral supports (i.e., all students, small groups of students, and individual students).

One elementary school, for example, established four interdisciplinary teams. The *EBIS leadership team*

(principal, counselor, literacy specialist, special educator, and English language learner specialist) met with grade-level teacher teams in the fall, winter, and spring to evaluate progress data for all students and identify students whose low or slow progress would suggest more targeted interventions. In addition, the EBIS leadership team met monthly with *grade-level teacher teams* to monitor and adjust existing specialized small-group and individual student interventions. On some occasions, these monthly meetings were conducted before and after school or during school hours by using “roving” substitute teachers who released grade-level teachers to participate in meetings.

In this school, content *study teams* were established to identify and examine solutions for specific school questions or issues (e.g., reading strategies for students with hyperactive-attention behaviors). Last, a *behavior support team* met monthly to lead, coordinate, and maintain schoolwide behavior prevention activities and supports. By tracking behavior data (e.g., ODRs), this team established action plans with activities that were schoolwide (all students and staff, across all settings), in a specific setting (e.g., cafeteria), in the classroom, or for an individual student.

Instructional Data Collection, Rules, and High-Stakes Decisions

Because data were central to monitoring student progress and informing instructional decisions, performance data were collected on all students three times a year and on students in small-group and individualized interventions as frequently as weekly. To guide decision making, a set of rules was applied at each of the three tiers of intervention continuum: Tier 1, universal; Tier 2, targeted; and Tier 3, specialized.

At Tier 1, for example, DIBELS reading indicators were collected on all K–5 students in late September and early October. Schoolwide, grade-level, and classroom information was used to evaluate the effectiveness, quality of implementation, efficiency, appropriateness, and so on of core curricula. Thus, based on the data, one of the following decisions might result: stay with curriculum or intervention, change or modify core curricula, provide additional professional development to increase teacher fluency, supplement curriculum, or provide more intensive supports for students who are not responding to core curriculum.

By identifying performance data patterns across students, the EBIS teams could determine the most effective and efficient instructional or behavioral groupings for providing supports. The general rule was that the

“lowest 20%” of students (usually all students scoring in the *deficit* and *low strategic* ranges) were selected for small-group interventions. Other information was also considered, for example, state, district, and classroom academic assessments; behavior (e.g., attendance, discipline, tardies); or additional supports (e.g., counseling, health, family).

This process of identifying and placing students into small-group (Tier 2) interventions was completed each fall and reviewed thereafter in winter and spring by the EBIS and grade-level teacher teams. Although instructional problem solving was centered on reading, where the majority of problems occurs, a student could be considered for any academic or behavior concern. For example, a decision rule specified that “more than 5 absences or more than 3 counseling or discipline referrals in a 30-day period” automatically prompted evaluation for intervention. Teachers could nominate other students for whom they had concerns at any time. However, the only stipulation was that students must need and be scheduled into a specific intervention. Students could not be placed just to be “discussed.” Student progress and intervention effectiveness were reviewed on a monthly basis.

“Inadequate response to an intervention” was defined as “four consecutive data points below the projected line of desired progress.” A checklist, “Options for Changing Interventions,” assisted teachers and teams to manipulate and test instructional variables. Intervention changes could be made at one of four levels:

1. Student level, for example, add an incentive, increase response opportunities, increase instruction time.
2. Curriculum or program level, for example, check fidelity of implementation, add another component to the existing program, supplement with a computer program.
3. Instruction-practices level, for example, change skill group, increase pace of instruction, preteach concepts outside the group.
4. Instruction-logistics level, for example, reduce group size, change instructor, change environment.

For students who did not improve after receiving two small-group interventions of 4 to 8 weeks in duration, depending on the stability of the progress data, at least one individualized, intensive intervention was provided prior to considering referral for special education evaluation. During this phase, the EBIS team or a subgroup of the team formally reviewed the student’s school records and information from current teachers and parents, including the student’s birth and developmental history.

With the learning disability (LD) “exclusionary criteria” in mind, the student’s school and RtI history also were explored in an effort to identify alternative explanations for the student’s failure to respond to interventions. Approximately 7% to 10% of students in the district reached this last phase of intensive, but still, general education, intervention, and individual action plans were developed for each student. In the absence of a viable alternative hypothesis (e.g., excessive absences, lack of effective instruction, significant behavior problems, trauma, cultural or language differences), a typical individualized intervention involved a second, complementary “dose” of an intervention specifically targeted at the student’s skill deficit.

Intervention details for each student were monitored through narrative and checklist record keeping and progress monitoring charts (e.g., curriculum modifications, group size, frequency, duration, teacher, and intervention progress and changes). Most teams began this record keeping and monitoring at the point a student required a change or second small-group intervention. All information records (e.g., record keeping forms and checklists, action plan, progress charts, notes, etc.) were transferred to special education staff when students were referred for the final phase of special education evaluation.

Research- and Evidence-Based Practices

Research-based practices and expert opinion were high priority and guided the EBIS implementation: (a) universal screening and progress monitoring, (b) literacy organizational structure, (c) core reading curriculum and intervention programs, and (d) positive social-behavioral supports (Adams, 1990; Deno, 1985; Fletcher et al., 1998; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Good et al., 1998; Good & Kaminski, 1996; Howell, Fox, & Morehead, 1993; Juel, 1988; Kaminski & Good, 1996; Lyon & Chhabra, 1996; Shinn, 1989, 1995; Simmons et al., 2000; Torgeson & Wagner, 1998; Vellutino et al., 2000). A practice was considered evidence based if demonstrated to be effective and efficacious through quantitatively rigorous and peer-reviewed research. As new research was identified, contextual changes were experienced (e.g., administrator retirement, new state policy), and/or changes in student performance patterns were revealed, adjustments were made in practices and systems supports. Four evidence-based practices were emphasized in the EBIS implementation:

1. Universal screening and progress monitoring. A system of curriculum-based measurement was initiated in 1989 (Hagen-Gilden & Sadler, 1993) and

later enhanced with the implementation of the DIBELS in 1999 (Kaminski & Good, 1996).

2. Literacy organizational structure. A multitiered model was adopted for schoolwide beginning reading support (Simmons et al., 2000): (a) prioritized reading goals and objectives, (b) focused and sustained staff development, (c) prioritized and protected teaching time, (d) research-based core reading programs, (e) intensified interventions that focused on the big ideas of beginning reading, and (f) formative assessment.
3. Core reading curriculum and intervention programs. Two research-based core reading approaches were in place in the district: Open Court (Scholastic Research Association, 2000), used in seven of the elementary schools, and Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 1998), used in two schools. Additional, supplemental reading programs and practices were selected to effectively address the main elements of early reading instruction (i.e., phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) when appropriately matched with individual student needs and school contexts (National Reading Panel, 2000). For example, the Early Reading Intervention (ERI) curriculum (Kame’enui & Simmons, 1998–2003) was used with at-risk kindergarten readers (see Table 1).
4. Positive social-behavioral supports. The multitiered approach of SWPBS provided a continuum of practices that emphasized prevention of problem behaviors, teaching of prosocial skills, and continuous data-based decision making (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, et al., 2000), for example, (a) Tier 1, Second Steps and Steps to Respect (Committee for Children, n.d.); (b) Tier 2, behavioral contracting, social skills club, a check-in/check-out program, First Steps to Success (Walker et al., 1990; Walker, Stiller, et al., 1997); and (c) Tier 3, team-based implementation of function-based behavior intervention planning (Horner & Sugai, 2005).

Systems for Information Management and Data-Based Action Planning

Determining whether students’ performance problems were occurring at individual, class, grade, or school levels was especially important for allocation of planning, intervention, and professional development resources. In addition, information on implementation fidelity typically was gathered by a combination of district staff, literacy specialists, learning specialists, and principals to determine the extent to which interventions and practices were implemented comprehensively and accurately.

Table 1
District Standard Reading Protocol for Students Grades K–5, 2005–2006

Grade	Tier 1		Tier 2		Tier 3	
	Daily Min.	Program Options	Additional Daily Min. (Group Size)	Program Options	Additional Daily Min. (Group Size)	Program Options
K	60	Open Court Success for All	10–15 (large)	Ladders to Literacy Phonemic Awareness in Young Children Road to the Code	30 (small)	Early Reading Intervention Language for Learning
1	60–90	Open Court Success for All	30 (small)	Open Court booster Success for All tutoring	30 (small)	Early Reading Intervention Language for Learning Reading Mastery
2	60–90	Open Court Success for All	45 (small)	Phonics for Reading Read Naturally	Two, 45 (small)	Reading Mastery Read Naturally Language for Thinking
3	60–90	Open Court Success for All	45 (small)	Open Court Intervention Phonics for Reading Read Naturally	30–45 (small vocabulary and comprehension) plus Two 45 (small)	Horizons Read Naturally Reading Mastery
4 and 5	60–90	Houghton-Mifflin Success for All	15–30 (small skill group)	REWARDS Six-Minute Solution Read Naturally Collaborative Strategic Reading Navigate STARS/CARS Connections for Comprehension	30–45 (small vocabulary and comprehension) plus 45–90 (small)	Reading Mastery Horizons Read Naturally Great Leaps Corrective Reading Reading Mastery

Prior to beginning each school year, EBIS leadership teams evaluated and renewed their annual action plans using data from a variety of school- and student-level sources, including district and state academic assessments, DIBELS reports (Good & Kaminski, 2007), ODRs, attendance and grade reports, and the EBS Self-Assessment (Sugai, Horner, & Todd, 2000). In addition, systems-level data were collected using two evaluation tools: (a) *School-Wide Evaluation Tool* (SET; Horner et al., 2004; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001) and (b) *Planning and Evaluation Tool for School Wide Reading-Revised* (PET-R; Kame'enui & Simmons, 2003).

The following illustrates how data were used for decision making and planning in the area of early reading. On the DIBELS year-end benchmarks in 2006, 20% or fewer students were in the *deficit-high risk* group (ranging from 3% in kindergarten to 19% in fourth grade). However, of the *nondeficit* students, between 58% and 88% were in the *established-some risk* group, and between 9% and 27% were in the *emerging-low risk* group. In other words, although desirable, getting 80% of the students firmly into the established range is difficult at most grade levels and increasingly so in the upper grades. Thus, EBIS teams explored additional questions,

such as (a) How many students were moving from not meeting to meeting to exceeding state benchmarks? (b) How many students were improving from *deficit* to *emerging* to *established* status on the DIBELS? and (c) Under what conditions were these outcomes occurring?

Principal and Teacher Involvement and Leadership

A combination of school principal and teacher leadership was central to successful and sustained implementation of EBIS. Under the direction of their principals, eight teachers and specialists, on average, met monthly to collaboratively and actively plan and implement school prevention and intervention activities. As a result, teachers in the district reported that EBIS teamwork provided them with a sense of (a) meaning, because the work was important and worth caring about; (b) competence, because they had confidence in their ability to know and perform the work; (c) self-determination, because they had opportunities to choose how to do the work; and (d) impact, because they had opportunities to have influence in the work and lead others. These findings were consistent with effective schools' research on

the power of teacher teamwork (Barth, 1990; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Quinn, 1999).

In addition, principals contributed to the success of the EBIS implementation by regularly attending and actively participating in school-level leadership team meetings, giving priority to EBIS in school improvement planning, incorporating data-based decision making into their administrative activities, and providing resources for curriculum and instructional practices adoption and sustained implementation.

Throughout the course of EBIS implementation, district leadership (i.e., superintendent, district administrators, and school board members) provided recurring and long-term fiscal and personnel support for implementation. The school board gave priority to the initiative by using EBIS language and processes in their overall strategic plan in areas related to establishing positive school climate and safety, supporting students with chronic behavior problems, decreasing school dropout, enhancing teacher proficiency and professional development, and maximizing academic achievement for all students. For example, in the area of literacy, EBIS occasioned districtwide establishment of (a) an early literacy coordinator; (b) a K–5 literacy specialist in each school; (c) a literacy leadership team; (d) collaborative planning among general education, Title 1, English language learning, and special education; (e) a standard reading protocol (e.g., 60 min of daily reading in kindergarten and 90 min of daily reading in Grades 1–5); and (f) fidelity of implementation standards.

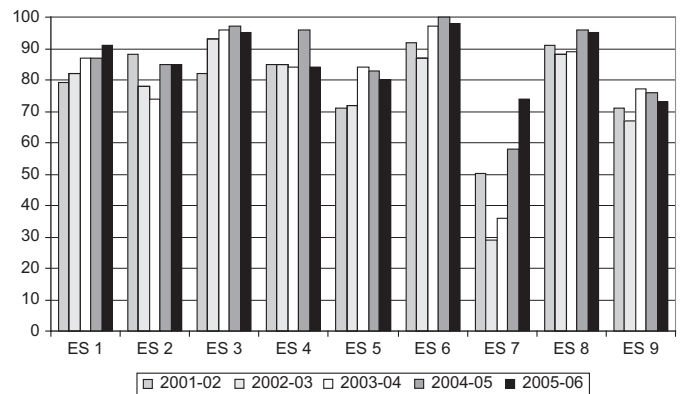
EBIS Outcomes

Summative and formative review of implementation fidelity and outcomes is essential to the effective and efficient implementation of an EBIS approach (Sadler, 2000b). Four major outcomes were evaluated across the nine elementary schools: (a) sustained implementation of EBS, (b) improved social behavior, (c) improved early literacy and reading achievement, and (d) improved evaluation, prevention, and early identification of LD. In the following sections, outcomes are described in the context of the descriptive evaluation data that were reviewed by the district leadership team.

Outcome 1: Sustained Implementation of EBS

The *School Wide Evaluation Tool* (SET; Sugai et al., 2001) was used to measure the district's implementation of EBS within elementary schools across time. Administration of the SET involves a 2- to 3-hr school site visit including observations and interviews with staff and students. Seven primary features of SWPBS are

Figure 1
Five-Year Trends on the School Wide Evaluation Tool for Nine District Schools, Total Scores 2001–2002 Through 2005–2006



Note: ES = elementary school.

measured with the SET, including the extent to which schools have developed and implemented a set of simple rules, consistently taught and reinforced rules and expectations, consistently responded to behavior problems, and used teamwork, leadership, and data for decision making. SET outcomes have been found to be reliable and valid measures of SWPBS implementation and closely linked to other indicators of school climate and safety (Horner et al., 2004). Scores of 80% or higher on the Total and Teaching Expectations features of the SET indicate that schools are successfully maintaining SWPBS (Horner & Sugai, 2002; Todd et al., 2003). SET data were collected for the district's elementary schools from 2001 through 2006, with the overall average increasing from 79% in 2001–2002 to 86% in 2005–2006 (see Figure 1).

Outcome 2: Improved Social Behavior

The district developed and maintained a set of clear and discriminating definitions and processing procedures for a range of rule-violating behaviors, which were administratively tracked as office discipline referral data within each school. ODR data can serve as a readily available and valid source of information about the disciplinary climate of the school (Irvin et al., 2006; Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Because ODR data were not available at the initiation of EBS in 1996, a calculation of a non-EBS baseline was not possible. However, the average numbers of ODRs per 100 students per day in the district's elementary schools were as follows:

0.183 in 1999–2000 (912 referrals; $n = 5$ schools; 2,899 students)
 0.159 in 2004–2005 (1,294 referrals; $n = 8$ schools; 4,732 students)
 0.176 in 2005–2006 (1,666 referrals; $n = 10$ schools; 5,517 students)

In general, the district's ODR rates were maintained at substantially lower rates than what was reported for a sample of 1,010 elementary schools in the University of Oregon's School Wide Information System (www.swis.org) database for the 2005–2006 academic year (0.37 per 100 students per day).

Outcome 3: Improve K–3 Early Literacy and Reading Achievement

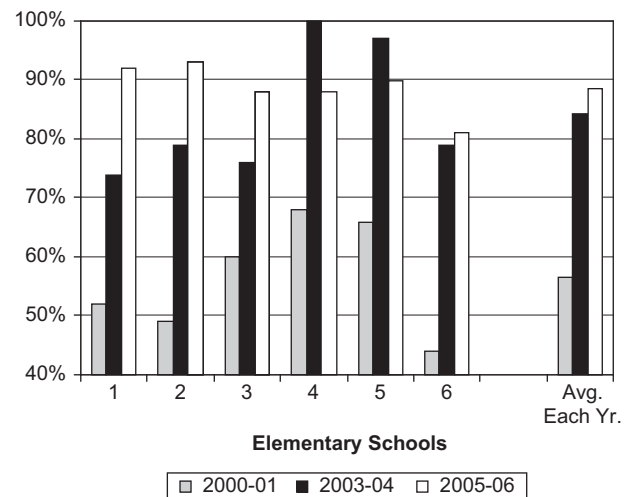
The Early Reading Intervention curriculum (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1998–2003) was implemented as a targeted group intervention for at-risk kindergarten readers. As illustrated in Figure 2, the percentage of kindergarten students in the *emerging* and *established* ranges on the DIBELS benchmark Phoneme Segmentation Fluency increased dramatically between spring 2001 (pre-implementation) and spring 2004 (post-implementation). Upward progress continued through 2006 with ERI implementation.

During the 5 years of improved reading instruction through EBIS implementation (2001–2006), the number of students in the *deficit* range on the Phonemic Segmentation and Oral Reading Fluency measures of the DIBELS decreased from 8% to 3% at kindergarten and from 21% to 10% at first grade (see Figure 3). Similar improvement was documented for third graders but was not as compelling for second graders.

Scores on the DIBELS and the Oregon state assessment of reading and literature seemed to be related for a cohort of first- through third-grade students. Students who reached the Oral Reading Fluency benchmark on the DIBELS in the spring of first grade who then remained in the district's instructional program for the next 2 years had a 98% to 99% chance of meeting the state reading benchmark at third grade (1,195 pairs of first- to third-grade scores, 2003 and 2004).

In addition, students who exceeded the state reading benchmark (not just met) at third grade were highly likely to meet the benchmark at fifth grade. Seventy-five percent (341 of 456) of students who met the DIBELS benchmark at the end of first grade (2002) did, in fact, exceed the state reading benchmark at the end of third grade (2004). In contrast, only 25% (49 of 195) of the students below benchmark on the DIBELS achieved the

Figure 2
Percentage of Kindergarten Students in *Established* Range on DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency Pre- and Post-Implementation (2000–2001 Through 2005–2006) of the Early Reading Intervention Curriculum in Six Title 1 Elementary Schools



Note: DIBELS = *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (Kaminsky & Good, 1996).

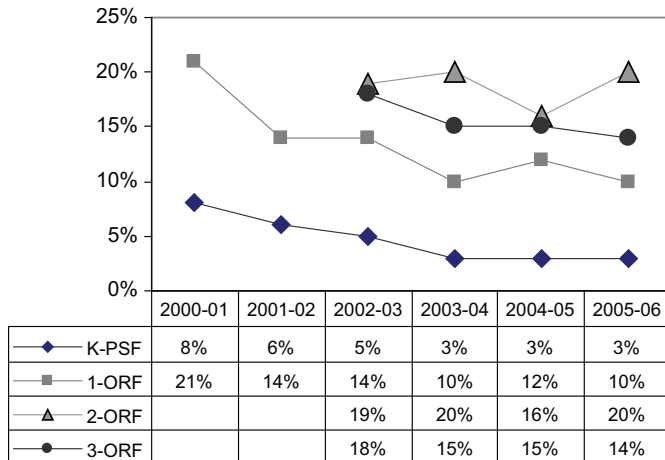
exceeds range 3 years later. McIntosh and Sadler (2007) showed that benchmark acquisition of DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency at the end of kindergarten predicts meeting and/or exceeding the state reading benchmark in fifth grade.

Finally, behavior and academic performance appear to be related (see Figure 4). A comparison of students' average numbers of office discipline referrals and their average scores in Grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 on the state reading assessment suggests that students with zero to one referral are likely to meet the reading standard. Across the grade levels, students with fewer office discipline referrals were likely to earn higher scores on the reading assessment. Fifth-grade students with zero to one ODR, for example, scored 8 points higher than their peers with six or more ODRs, and 10th-grade students scored an average 9 points higher.

Outcome 4: Improved Evaluation, Prevention, and Early Identification of Learning Disabilities

With each year of EBIS implementation, improvement was reported by district and school teams in the collaboration among general and special education staff members at both district and school levels. In addition, early identification and effective intervention with

Figure 3
Percentage of K–3 Students in *Deficit* Range on DIBELS Benchmarks Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), Spring 2001 Through Spring 2006



Note: DIBELS = *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (Kaminsky & Good, 1996).

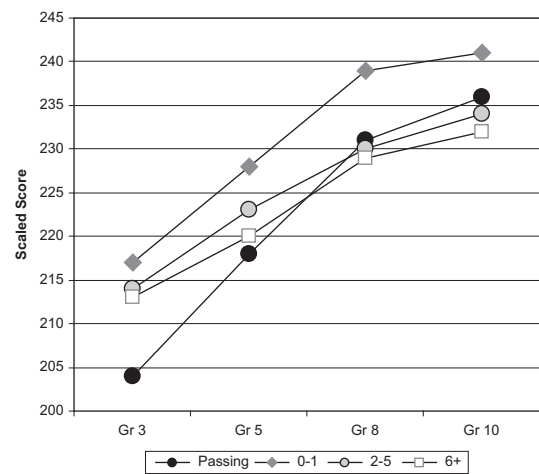
students was reported as preventing many academic and behavior referrals to special education.

Teams reported that the process for referring those few students for special education referral, who failed to progress even with improved intervention at each of the three tiers (core, strategic, and intensive), was facilitated by the availability of decision-making information (opportunity to learn, cultural or language differences, other emotional or sensory factors, etc.) gathered through the EBIS process. Additionally, nationally published, norm-referenced assessments of achievement or intellectual ability were required less often (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschley, & Vaughn, 2004; Gresham, 2002; Reschley & Grimes, 1995; Shapiro, 2004; Share, McGee, & Silva, 1989; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Ysseldyke, 2002).

The EBIS process affected special education evaluation and eligibility practices in the district in three important ways. First, the elementary schools developed fully integrated, highly collaborative teams that were led by a representative group of general and special educators. These team members shared resources and monitored the ongoing progress of all students. In many cases, these teams successfully blurred traditional lines between general and special education resources and processes.

Second, district and school reading experts had more opportunities to implement and test best-practice interventions and progress-monitoring protocols for young students with moderate to intensive reading deficits

Figure 4
Comparison of Student Achievement on the Oregon State Assessment Reading and Literature Benchmarks in Spring 2006 for Students at Grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 With Zero to One, Two to Five, and Six or More Office Discipline Referrals



(e.g., Project CIRCUITS; Kame'enui, Simmons, Good, & Chard, 2001–2006), which were integrated into the standard reading protocol and RtI implementation (Burns, 2007).

Finally, although the district had no history of overidentification (i.e., about 10%, LD representing about 60% of all special education), more students were identified at earlier grade levels. The number of first-grade students identified as having LD increased from 8 in 2003–2004 to 12 in 2005–2006, and the number of second-grade students increased from 19 to 49, suggesting a trend toward earlier identification. Anecdotally, special educators reported that students who went through the EBIS process and reached formal referral for special education, primarily for LD, “nearly always turned out to be eligible.”

In addition to improvements in early identification, efforts to enhance early intervention also were noted. For example, in the fall of 2000, 142 kindergarten students (18%) were in the *deficit* range (DIBELS Initial Sound Fluency), and in the Spring of 2001, 59 students (8%) continued to be in the *deficit* range (DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency). In contrast, in the fall of 2005, 184 students (21%) were in the *deficit* range, and in the spring of 2006, just 25 students (3%) remained in the *deficit* range. The number of first-grade students in the *deficit* range changed from 28% in the fall of 2000 to 21% in the spring of 2001 and from 22% to 10% between fall of 2005 and spring of 2006. Results were

comparable in 2006–2007 for K–1. However, given the durability of reading difficulties over time, second graders performance improved but less substantially.

Conclusions and Cautions

Kurt Lewin once said, “If you want to truly understand something, try to change it” (“Kurt Lewin Quotes,” n.d.). The EBIS implementation taught district educators much about changing and sustaining accurate schoolwide and systemwide practices and processes, more than exceeding Latham’s (1988) “four year life expectation” for educational innovations. The model integrated research on systems change, safe schools, effective reading instruction, early intervention and prevention of learning and behavior disabilities, and assessment and eligibility practices within special education. The process required continually revisiting participants’ understandings and agreements, ownership, leadership, collaboration, and effectiveness at all levels.

Clearly, one of the most significant contributions of the EBIS approach to the literature is the manner in which all teachers are engaged in an effective and efficient universal screening, early identification, and early intervention process. In addition, collaborative planning and implementation and a period of “prereferral” intervention were given priority over individual teacher referrals and requests for special education evaluation. The RtI approach improves the traditional prereferral process because students with extraordinary behavioral and instructional needs are identified through universal screening in the 1st month of kindergarten, followed by continuous progress monitoring and instructional review. A highly prescriptive, collaborative mechanism gives students and their teachers access to early instructional and behavioral support so that they no longer have to “wait to fail.” In this district, special education identification did not necessarily mean a substantial change in intervention, because students referred for evaluation through the EBIS process were already receiving highly individualized and intensive intervention. In fact, some students were referred *because* the interventions were so intensive.

On a cautionary note, the findings and generalizations from the EBIS experiences are derived from data obtained within an evaluation design used to monitor implementation of a school- and districtwide initiative, and as such, a causal relationship cannot be inferred. The use of an experimental design would have been preferred so statements about functional relationships between project practices and student outcomes could be made with greater confidence. However, as a model demonstration

project, the EBIS effort was focused on the systems-level adoption, use, and evaluation of evidence-based early reading practices and processes. Future research should adopt a more experimental approach toward understanding the functional relationship between EBIS and student literacy and behavior outcomes.

To reiterate, this effort represents a districtwide effort to establish sustained use of evidence-based early literacy and behavior support practices. During a 10-year period, the EBIS approach provided schools with experiences that resulted in sustained reductions in students’ discipline referral rates, increases in the percentage of students on track for early reading benchmarks, and improvements in special education evaluation of learning disabilities. Contributing to these outcomes was the systematic integration of effective practices, including capacity building professional development, schoolwide positive behavior support, early literacy, early intervention, and special education evaluation and identification using student RtI. At school and district levels, a continuum of behavior and academic supports was established for all students, and specialized interventions were implemented for students struggling with behavior and/or academic challenges. Clearly, the EBIS approach is promising in that student outcomes were enhanced; however, more rigorous experimental analyses are needed to increase our confidence in the functional relationship between EBIS and those student outcomes.

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