

# POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT 2009–2010 RESEARCH BRIEF April, 2011

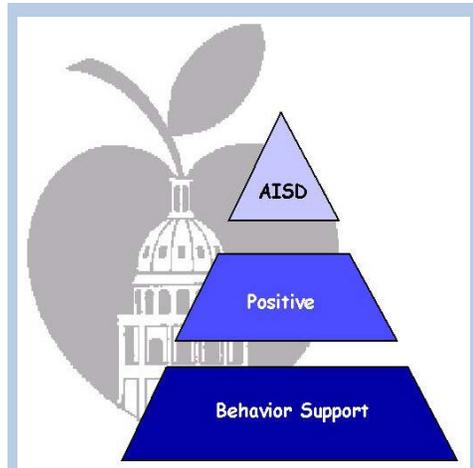
## Program Description

Positive Behavior Support (PBS), first piloted in Austin Independent School District (AISD) in 2003–2004, is a systems approach to the prevention of problem behavior and the improvement of student academic performance. In 2009–2010, PBS was implemented at 80 AISD campuses, with support from the district team. Through PBS, campuses develop a continuum of interventions, from universal interventions implemented across all students, staff, and settings to intensive interventions for students with high needs. These interventions are delivered within school-wide, classroom, and individual student systems. PBS specialists support campus implementation and deliver embedded professional development opportunities, while campus staff use data to identify needs, design interventions, and monitor improvement. This research brief describes PBS implementation at AISD campuses during 2009–2010 and the relationships between PBS implementation and school climate, attendance, and discipline.

## Campus PBS Implementation

PBS implementation was assessed using the AISD Benchmark Tool that captured ratings of implementation levels for each PBS system: team, school wide, classroom, and individual student. In Spring 2010, PBS implementation for the four systems ranged from campuses that had not yet begun implementation to campuses in the high intermediate stage.

- **Elementary schools:** PBS was implemented at 54 elementary schools in 2009–2010. Of those, 43 continued from 2008–2009. On average, implementation was in the beginning stage for school-wide and classroom systems and the planning/training stage for the individual student system.
- **Middle schools:** PBS was implemented at 17 middle schools in 2009–2010. Of those, 11 continued from 2008–2009. On average, implementation was in the beginning stage for school-wide and classroom systems and the planning/training stage for the individual student system
- **High schools:** PBS was implemented at six high schools in 2009–2010. Of those, two continued from 2008–2009. On average, implementation was in the planning/training stage for school-wide and classroom systems and had not yet begun for the individual student system.
- **Alternative schools:** PBS was implemented at three alternative schools in 2009–2010: Lucy Read Pre-Kindergarten School, Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders, and The Alternative Learning Center. Averages are not reported for this category because of differences in organization and student population among the schools.



### OVERVIEW

The AISD PBS program improves student behavior and the learning environment through school-wide and classroom behavior management structures and individualized student interventions. In 2009–2010, PBS was implemented at 80 campuses, with support from a district team of 15 PBS specialists, a technical assistance facilitator, and a program coordinator.

### DURING 2009–2010, PBS SERVED:

Elementary schools	54
Middle schools	17
High schools	6
Alternative schools	3

Total students:	53,887
Total staff:	6,942

### Program Impact

- ✓ *At secondary schools, better PBS classroom implementation was related to lower discipline referral rates and fewer students with five or more referrals.*
- ✓ *At secondary schools with high PBS classroom implementation, discretionary suspension/removal rates decreased by 37% from the previous year.*
- ✓ *Students at PBS campuses, on average, rated their schools as being fairer and their teachers as giving more praise or rewards than did students at non-PBS campuses.*

## Student Outcomes

With 59 campuses in their second continuous year, or more, of PBS implementation during 2009–2010, the focus of the student outcome evaluation was on change in school climate, attendance, discipline, and disparity in suspension/removal rates between African American and non-African American students. Results indicate that PBS was associated with positive perceptions of campus staff by elementary and secondary students and that better PBS classroom system implementation improved discipline from the previous year and achieved gains in instructional time at secondary schools. Conclusions about the effect of PBS on discipline disproportionality could not be drawn because of confounding factors (i.e., school level and differences among campuses in the racial distribution of students). Results also did not warrant conclusions about an impact of PBS on attendance rates.

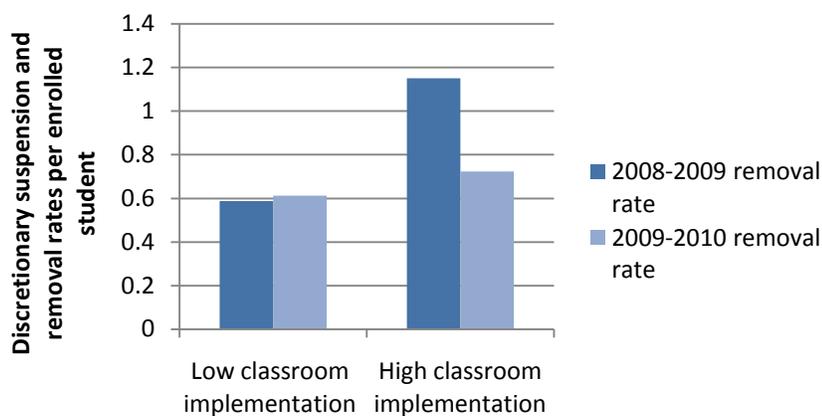
*I was like, whoa, yeah, that really works you know, “I like the way so-and-so is sitting, I like the way so-and-so is lining up” and then the rest of them just fall into place. So if I can remember to keep doing that it would definitely be helpful.*

Elementary school teacher  
AISD (2010) teacher interviews

## DISCIPLINE

At secondary schools, the level of PBS classroom system implementation in 2009–2010 was positively related to the following changes between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010: (a) a decrease in overall discipline referral rates, (b) a decrease in the percentage of students with five or more referrals, and (c) a decrease in discretionary suspension/removal rates. Campuses with high PBS classroom implementation had a decrease in discretionary suspension/removal rates of 37% compared with rates the previous year, and campuses with low classroom implementation had an increase in discretionary suspension/removal rates of 3% (Figure 1). As a result of improvements in discipline rates, PBS contributed to gains in instructional days at secondary schools.

**Figure 1. Secondary School Discretionary Suspension/Removal Rates at High and Low PBS Classroom System Implementation Campuses**



Source. AISD student records (ADIS); AISD Positive Behavior Support Benchmark Tool, Department of Program Evaluation

Note. The low classroom implementation group had 18 campuses, and the high classroom implementation group had 17 campuses.

Campuses in the high and low classroom implementation groups differed from each other in two ways: (a) a higher percentage of campuses with high 2009–2010 classroom implementation participated in PBS during 2008–2009 (88% and 56%, respectively) and (b) a higher percentage of campuses with high classroom implementation than of campuses with low classroom implementation were elementary schools (82% and 50%, respectively).

## SCHOOL CLIMATE

The entire range of PBS interventions, from universal to intensive levels, is expected to affect school climate by establishing a culture that is respectful, predictable, and focused on learning. Elementary and secondary students at PBS campuses, on average, rated their schools as being fairer and their teachers as giving more praise or rewards for good behavior and for good work than did students at non-PBS campuses. Students at PBS campuses reported feeling less safe at their school than did students at non-PBS campuses. In contrast, teachers at PBS elementary and secondary campuses were less satisfied with how their campus addressed student behavior, classroom management, and common area management than were teachers at non-PBS campuses.

Climate Survey Item	Non-PBS	PBS
The school rules are fair.	3.67	3.75↑
Students at my school follow the rules.	3.16	3.02↓
I feel safe at my school.	3.73	3.64↓
Teachers give rewards or praise for good behavior.	3.44	3.59↑
Teachers give rewards or praise for good work.	3.42	3.57↑
All my teachers use the same rules.	3.81	3.97↑

*Source.* AISD Climate Survey 2009–2010, Department of Program Evaluation  
*Note:* Significant differences between PBS and non-PBS campuses are indicated by an arrow, based on a meaningful effect size, as measured by Cohen's *d*. 1 = *never*, 2 = *not a lot*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *always*.

Climate Survey Item	Non-PBS	PBS
The school rules are fair.	3.29	3.20↓
Students at my school follow the rules.	3.08	2.89↓
I feel safe at my school.	3.58	3.46↓
Teachers give rewards or praise for good behavior.	3.06	3.11
Teachers give rewards or praise for good work.	3.09	3.20↑
All my teachers use the same rules.	3.29	3.55↑

*Source.* AISD Climate Survey 2009–2010, Department of Program Evaluation  
*Note.* Significant differences between PBS and non-PBS campuses are indicated by an arrow, based on a meaningful effect size, as measured by Cohen's *d*. 1 = *never*, 2 = *not a lot*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *always*.

Considering that PBS implementation at the end of 2009–2010 was, on average, just beyond the beginning level, greater teacher dissatisfaction with how their campuses addressed student behavior in the fall, and lower student ratings of school safety in the spring at PBS campuses, compared with ratings at non-PBS campuses, may reflect the needs that propel campuses to adopt PBS, as well as increased staff awareness of discipline issues. Student reports of more frequent teacher praise or rewards and more frequent consistent and fair application of rules may reflect campus responses to these needs and outcomes of initial PBS implementation.

## Implications for Future Initiatives

Lessons learned from PBS may be applicable to future district initiatives that incorporate campus data-based decision-making teams and embedded professional development opportunities:

1. Only a small number of PBS campuses ever advanced to the intermediate stage of implementation. It may be critical to identify the needs and obstacles related to program implementation in continuous and timely ways.
2. Classroom implementation was more strongly related to improved student outcomes than was implementation in the other three PBS systems. Teacher access to classroom system supports may be key to improving the learning environment because it has a direct impact on student outcomes.
3. Systematic differences between campuses that do and do not participate in voluntary district initiatives, as well as variation in the needs and goals of campuses that do participate, are challenges for fidelity of implementation and for providing guidance for improvement that is tailored to different campus conditions.