Behavior Intervention Planning and Implementation of Positive Behavioral Support Plans: An Examination of States’ Adherence to Standards for Practice

Kim Killu
University of Michigan–Dearborn
Kimberly P. Weber
K. Mark Derby
Anjali Barretto
Gonzaga University

Abstract: To address the behavioral needs of students with disabilities in school settings, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) requires the development and implementation of a behavior intervention plan/positive behavioral support plan (BIP/PBSP) based on positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). Despite the BIP/PBSP mandate, there are no federal guidelines in place to direct school personnel. Many states have assumed responsibility for establishing policies governing BIPs/PBSPs. This investigation examined the resources acquired or developed and disseminated by state education agencies (SEAs) in all 50 states and compared the information available in these resources with standard practice for BIP/PBSP development and PBIS practice.

Since the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was issued, schools have been formally required to complete a behavior intervention plan (BIP) based on a functional behavior assessment (FBA) for each student with disabilities who has significant behavior problems or whose behavior impedes his or her learning. Significant advancements in behavioral technology have allowed practitioners to improve student behavior (Repp & Horner, 1999; Sugai, 1998; Sugai & Horner, 1999), yet the completion of FBAs and BIPs may pose challenges for school personnel. Issues such as lack of time, resources, and support; differences in philosophical orientation toward disciplinary practices and behavior management; and a lack of knowledge about assessment and intervention planning can interfere with the effective development and implementation of BIPs (Buck, Polloway, Kirkpatrick, Patton, & Fad, 2000).

State education agencies (SEAs) have been directed to oversee the design of BIPs and positive behavioral support plans (PBSPs). Positive behavioral support (PBS) refers to the application of a broad range of interventions focused on individuals and/or systems, using positive behavioral interventions and supports to facilitate important social and learning outcomes that prevent problem behavior and promote positive behavior change (Carr et al., 2002; Horner, Albin, Sprague, & Todd, 1999). PBS has been introduced into the school system as a means of addressing severe problem behaviors among students.

Weber, Killu, Derby, and Barretto (2005) have examined the status of FBAs in the 50 United States, comparing the documentation and resources provided by each state with standard practice in FBA methodology. Because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA; P.L. 108-446) requires that a BIP be based on an FBA, it stands to reason that any flaws and omissions in FBA methodology will have an impact on the design and execution of an appropriate and effective BIP. Before making comparisons between each state’s resources and standard practice, it is reasonable to assess the type of information available regarding BIPs/PBSPs. This investigation was designed to determine whether each SEA had established resources to help with the design and execution of BIPs/PBSPs, and if resources were available, how they compared with the criteria set in Technical Assistance Guide 1: Applying Positive Behavioral Support and Functional Behavioral Assessment in Schools (Version 1.4.4;
Method

PARTICIPANTS

The SEAs for the 50 United States served as participants in this study. Forty-nine SEAs complied with requests for information.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

No Response/Response

“No response” was indicated when, after at least five telephone conversations, no verbal or written information was received regarding BIPs/PBSPs. A “response” was indicated when (a) the investigators received written material from an SEA or (b) a telephone conversation with the SEA indicated that it had no materials available regarding BIPs/PBSPs.

Resource/No Resource

We defined a resource as written information designed and/or distributed by the SEA that contains procedures, strategies, or suggestions on BIP/PBSP methodology. We defined No resource as a response from the SEA indicating that written materials were neither available nor disseminated to educators.

BIP Component Criteria

Two organizations funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)—the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (http://www.air.org/cecp/) and the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (http://www.pbis.org/)—have developed a series of documents describing effective practices in FBA, BIPs, and PBS. These documents have been reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education for compliance with IDEA and serve as guidelines of standard practice in FBA and BIP development and implementation.

We selected 25 items from these guidelines for use as criteria of standard practice in completing BIPs/PBSPs. Criteria for standard practice were obtained from original material in the Technical Assistance Guide (Sugai et al., 1999). These 25 items center on BIP/PBSP development, intervention strategies, targeting of specific behaviors, data collection, and review. See Table 1 for details on the specific component criteria used.

DESIGN

We designed the investigation as a descriptive analysis of the written resources and materials developed by each SEA about the design and implementation of BIPs/PBSPs.

PROCEDURES

Killu and Weber served as data collectors and evaluators. Both have doctoral degrees in special education and extensive training and experience in the theory and practice of applied behavior analysis. Data collection began with an Internet search for each SEA, during which Killu and Weber collected contact names, phone numbers, and other available information regarding BIPs/PBSPs. Killu or Weber then contacted each SEA by telephone and asked to speak with the individual responsible for providing school personnel with resources on how to complete or conduct BIPs/PBSPs. They made an average of three telephone calls to each SEA, during which they requested copies of relevant documents. Once documents were received, both Killu and Weber reviewed them against the BIP/PBSP component criteria listed in Table 1 and recorded the presence or absence of the 25 target items on a data collection sheet.

Interobserver Agreement

Interobserver agreement data were collected for 15 states selected by randomly pairing state names with the numbers 1 through 50 and evaluating those states that obtained the numbers 1 through 15. Interobserver agreement was calculated using the formula \[ \frac{\text{agreements}}{\text{agreements} + \text{disagreements}} \times 100 \]. Agreement was 100%.

Results

Forty-nine out of 50 states responded to the request for information. Forty states reported and submitted resources addressing the component criteria, whereas 9 reported that they did not have any relevant resources. Ten of the 40 states addressed all 25 component criteria in their materials. Among all respondents, the mean number of criteria addressed was 13.7, with a range of 0 through 25. Thirty-one states (of 40) provided materials in the form of videos, CD-ROMs, or training materials for at least some of the component criteria. Interestingly, 23 out of the 40 reporting states also included information on crisis management with their materials. State-by-state data on specific targeted criteria are available by contacting Killu or Weber. Figure 1 shows the total number of states that provided resources for each of the component criteria in the three areas of BIP/PBSP development, execution, and maintenance.
Table 1. BIP/PBSP Component Criteria Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>BIP/PBSP criterion</th>
<th>Criterion description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Was a functional behavior assessment (FBA) completed prior to the development of the behavior intervention plan (BIP)/positive behavioral support plan (PBSP)?</td>
<td>Any reference to FBA or inclusion of BIP/PBSP information with FBA information was counted.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Were strategies in the BIP/PBSP based on a hypothesis derived from an FBA?</td>
<td>Any reference to a hypothesis or an indication that there was a link or relationship between the FBA and BIP/PBSP was counted.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP identify and define the target behavior(s)?</td>
<td>Any reference to target behavior(s) or focus for intervention planning including a description of targeted behavior(s) was counted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP indicate a focus on increasing and/or decreasing the target behavior(s)?</td>
<td>Reference to increasing and/or decreasing some dimension of identified target behavior(s) was counted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address or indicate skill or performance deficits that might have contributed to the problem behavior of the student?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address teaching alternative skills or a replacement behavior to the problem behavior?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Was a task analysis considered if teaching alternative skills or a replacement behavior in the BIP/PBSP?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Did the team consider other previously implemented interventions in the BIP/PBSP?</td>
<td>References to comprehensive programs involving lifestyle changes or considered multiple options for interventions were not counted.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address short-term interventions?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address long-term interventions?</td>
<td>References to lifestyle changes, enhancing living or learning options, or lasting change were counted.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP consider positive behavioral interventions and/or systems?</td>
<td>References to positive strategies in general, positive nonaversive strategies, or interventions focusing on changing the relationship between the students’ behavior and the environment were counted.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address issues of social validity?</td>
<td>References to acceptance, support, meaning, importance, and satisfaction of the plan were counted.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address manipulating antecedent strategies (e.g., changes to the curriculum, changes in instructional strategies, modifications to the physical environment, or other supplementary aids and supports)?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address manipulating consequent strategies?</td>
<td>References to the use of reinforcement or punishment procedures were counted.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP address increasing the occurrence of appropriate (desired) behavior(s)?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP include goals, benchmarks, or objective(s)?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP include goals and objectives with specific mastery criteria?</td>
<td>References made to measurable goals were counted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP include clearly described procedures of how to execute the strategies?</td>
<td>Question provided clear indicators for identification.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Did the BIP/PBSP include requirements for ongoing data collection?</td>
<td>References to specific data collection procedures such as frequency or event recording, duration, latency, or interval recording were counted. Use of the term monitoring and references to a timeline for measurement were not counted.</td>
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BIP/PBSP DEVELOPMENT

Seventy-three percent of the states indicated that an FBA should be completed prior to a BIP/PBSP (Question 1) and that the plan should address the teaching of alternative skills or a replacement behavior to the problem behavior (Question 6). Likewise, 65% of the states provided resources for developing an intervention strategy based on a hypothesis derived from the results of an FBA (Question 2); addressed the need to identify and define the target behavior (Question 3); and considered positive behavioral interventions and/or systems (Question 11). The area least addressed in BIP/PBSP development, with only 20% of states providing resources, was completing a task analysis for the instruction of alternative skills or replacement behaviors (Question 7).

BIP/PBSP EXECUTION

The most frequently addressed issue, with 65% of states providing resources, was the manipulation of consequent strategies (Question 14). Sixty-three percent of states provided resources for the manipulation of antecedent strategies (Question 13) and requirements for ongoing data collection (Question 19). Less than half (45%) of states addressed data-based decision making (Question 20). The least addressed component criterion, with only 29% of states providing resources, was the development of goals and objectives with specific mastery criteria (Question 17).

BIP/PBSP MAINTENANCE

The most frequently addressed issue, with 67% of states providing resources, was follow-up of the behavior or establishing a timeline for follow-up (Question 24). The least frequently addressed issue, with 49% of states providing resources, was the examination of procedural integrity concerns (Question 25).

Discussion

The data obtained during our investigation reflect the results of a comprehensive review of established guidelines for the development and implementation of BIPs/PBSPs put together by SEAs across the United States. The materials reviewed were those most recently available from those SEAs that responded to requests for resources. Though the materials received from each SEA were purportedly disseminated to school personnel, the results obtained should not be taken to suggest the status of BIP/PBSP planning in schools in that state. Despite the availability of BIP/PBSP resources from each SEA, school district personnel are generally given autonomy in the design and execution of BIPs/PBSPs. Individual districts, schools, and/or school personnel therefore may design and implement BIPs/PBSPs complying to a greater or lesser extent than outlined by each SEA.

Given that federal regulations mandate the implementation of a BIP most specifically through the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, this information may prove useful in monitoring compliance with the disciplinary provisions. The data obtained also provide information to help each state assess service delivery and develop or improve services for students. States may also use the information obtained to determine areas of need for teacher and school personnel training or to evaluate the types and degrees of supports available. In addition, a comparison of the data with practice standards may serve as a baseline for evaluating BIP/PBSP effectiveness.
Although uniform data collection standards were used and data were received from 49 out of 50 states, it is possible that one or more SEAs did not provide all information available. Furthermore, despite the presentation of numerous documents and forms, directions on the use of these materials were frequently lacking. For example, data collection forms were provided with little or no explanation on their use. Often, behavior management strategies, such as token systems or behavioral contracts, were suggested as a generic means for dealing with problem behavior. Many states do disseminate these materials through in-service training sessions, and such a format would provide supplemental and contextual information. However, training sessions cannot be evaluated based on a review of printed materials, and school personnel are likely often left to work with the materials provided during such sessions. Such instances suggest a lack of uniform practices across states, presumably driven by a lack of knowledge base and effective practices.

Furthermore, the data indicate that states place only moderate emphasis on the relationship between the completion of FBAs and the development of BIPs/PBSPs. A good portion of states do not address the need (or mandate) for an FBA in their materials and resources on BIP/PBSP development. One major focus of an FBA is to identify the environmental correlates of a given behavior, which serve as a basis for developing a hypothesis about the behavior’s function. Such a hypothesis can, in turn, help in the development of appropriate interventions. The relationship between assessment and intervention has long been established in the literature on curriculum-based measures, in which assessment of students’ academic performance informs the development of more effective instructional strategies (Deno, 1985; Deno, Marston, & Tindal, 1986). Along similar lines, the literature has shown that the identification of environmental correlates of problem behavior leads to the development of more successful behavioral interventions (e.g., Dunlap et al., 1993). Despite the encouragement of Tilly et al. (1998) that states should provide guidance regarding uniform development and execution of FBAs to local school districts, there is little uniformity from state to state in materials on FBA practice (Weber et al., 2005). Taken together, these factors may lead to a lax approach in the development and implementation of BIPs/PBSPs.

Moreover, it appears that a less-than-comprehensive approach is being used to design and implement BIPs/PBSPs. The lack of attention to developing broad-based plans has implications for the effectiveness of treatment, including interventions addressing educational outcomes.
At best, BIPs/PBSPs appear to be used as reactive measures to deal with problem behavior, and at worst, as a perfunctory requirement of IDEIA. The purpose of developing BIPs/PBSPs is to be proactive in the treatment of individual students with problem behavior. The fundamental basis of positive behavioral support is to provide students with individualized interventions that teach positive, appropriate, and functional behaviors to facilitate integration in school and community settings (Horner et al., 1999). The foundation of comprehensive programming rests upon clear and detailed procedures for design and execution, and BIPs/PBSPs created according to carefully crafted guidelines are likely to result in more effective outcomes than those designed ad hoc. A lack of understanding of the criteria used to design BIP/PBSP interventions or insufficient knowledge of procedures based on those criteria is likely to lead to poorly developed interventions. Well-developed interventions lead to effective practice, effective outcomes, and the amelioration of student problems (Bambara, Mitchell-Kvacky, & Iacobelli, 1994; Carr, 1994; Horner & Carr, 1997; Iwata, 1994; Koegel et al., 1996; Mace, 1994; Neef & Iwata, 1994; Pelios, Morren, Tesch, & Axelrod, 1999). Practices such as direct observation, measurement, recording, and the use of controlled procedures are essential. Problem behaviors are likely to increase when educators lack training in effective strategies and technology used to deal with problem behavior. More effective behavioral outcomes would result from better defined requirements in the IDEA, with implications for improving educational performance as well as students’ behavior.

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Kim Killu,** PhD, is an associate professor of special education at the University of Michigan–Dearborn. Her current interests include applied behavior analysis, the assessment and treatment of severe behavior disorders, and functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention planning policy and practice. **Kimberly P. Weber,** PhD, is an associate professor of special education at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Her current interests include language development in children with limited verbal skills, effective reading strategies, functional behavior assessment, and classroom management. **K. Mark Derby,** PhD, is a professor of special education at Gonzaga University. He currently conducts research in the area of functional analysis/functional behavior assessment. **Anjali Barretto,** PhD, an associate professor of special education at Gonzaga University, conducts research in the areas of functional analysis and food refusal in young children. Address: Kim Killu, University of Michigan–Dearborn, School of Education, Fairlane Center, 19000 Hubbard Dr., Dearborn, MI 48126-2658; e-mail: kimkillu@umd.umich.edu.

**REFERENCES**


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