**Integrating Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

**Lead Author:** Dr. Sara Whitcomb

University of Massachusetts Amherst

**Research Narrative Reviewed by:** Dr. George Bear

University of Delaware & Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project

**PowerPoint Developed and Reviewed by:** Dr. Sara Whitcomb (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

Angela Harris, M.A., Sarah Hearn, M.Ed., and Laura Davidson, M.A.

(University of Delaware & Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project)

**Audio Recorded by:** Angela Harris, M.A.

University of Delaware & Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project

**Funding and Support from:** The Delaware Department of Education through the Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project and the School Climate and Student Success Grant

**The SWPBIS and SEL Approaches**

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) are coordinated and prevention-oriented approaches that support children’s healthy development. The primary goal of each approach is similar: the prevention of challenging behaviors and the promotion of wellness and positive social skills. However, there are fundamental differences between the two, which can make it a challenge for school professionals to “connect the dots” and integrate the two approaches.1,2 The purpose of this professional development module is to help school professionals deepen their understanding of these approaches, how they are complementary to one another, and how they can be integrated effectively and efficiently to enhance student learning and development.

**SWPBIS**

**Overview.** SWPBIS is a framework for structuring a school’s positive approach to discipline and developing an environment in which students are academically and socially skilled. Rooted in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), SWPBIS is a scaled application of how professionals might work with individual children with challenging behaviors.3,4 It is similarly centered on teaching and reinforcing desired behaviors and measuring the extent to which desired behaviors increase and undesired behaviors decrease. Like ABA, SWPBIS relies on school professionals to effectively arrange the environment to prevent challenging behaviors from occurring (i.e., focus on antecedents), teach socially adaptive alternatives to challenging behaviors (i.e., directly teach replacement behavior), and reinforce students use of the socially desired behavior (i.e., use positive reinforcement). At a school-wide level, this application of ABA relies on adults to commit to implementing a common approach to arranging the learning environment and teaching and acknowledging appropriate behaviors and discouraging and managing challenging behaviors. Further, the implementation of SWPBIS practices is a data-driven approach, in which teams of school professionals regularly examine student outcome data as well as process data that indicate the extent to which practices are implemented.

According to the *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Implementation Blueprint*, 5 SWPBIS is synonymous with a multi-tiered behavioral framework or 3-tiered model of support. This prevention-oriented, tiered framework was borrowed from the field of public health and includes *primary (universal), secondary (targeted),* and *tertiary (intensive)* tiers of assessment and intervention, which increase in intensity with the level of student need. The focus of this professional training module is on integration of SWPBIS and SEL at Tier 1, which applies to all individuals across all school settings.



**Implementation.** Implementation of SWPBIS is typically driven by 4 key, interactive elements---*outcomes, practices, data,* and *systems.*3Given the Tier 1 focus in this module, these elements are defined in Table 1, with examples of what they “look like” at that level.

Table 1. Definitions and Examples of Key Implementation Elements of SWPBIS

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| **Element** | **Definition** | **Tier 1 Examples** |
| **Outcomes** | Global indicators of behavioral/academic functioning | Behavior (decreased behavior problems, increased prosocial behavior), school climate, academic performance, attendance, nurse visits, counselor contacts |
| **Practices** | Set of strategies for teaching desired skills | 3-5 defined school-wide behavioral expectations, procedures for teaching and acknowledging behaviors that meet behavioral expectations, procedures for discouraging problem behaviors, procedures for using data to target needed practices. |
| **Data** | Information that is gathered and used to evaluate practices and outcomes | Climate surveys, office disciplinary referrals, suspensions, academic and behavioral screening information, attendance and tardy data, frequency of nurse/counselor contacts, fidelity of implementation checklists and observations |
| **Systems** | Supportive structures that allow professionals to efficiently use data and implement effective practices in a sustained way. | Team-based leadership, coaching support, data-based decision-making protocols, developed procedures and materials for implementing assessment and practices, active supervision protocols |

**Evidence Base. SWPBIS** has the largest evidence-base out of any school-wide intervention for managing student behavior6 and has been associated with:

* Lower levels of discipline7,8
* Improved perceptions among students of safety in school8
* Improvements in academic performance 8
* Decreased behavior problems (Bradshaw study on “bullying” – which really wasn’t a study of bullying but of problem behaviors)
* Improved perceptions among teachers of the school’s organizational health8,9

Further information about SWPBIS can be found at [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

**SEL**

**Overview.** Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a comprehensive approach to student learning that aims to support development of social and emotional competencies. When applied to classroom management and school discipline, emphasis is placed on developing those competencies most related to self-discipline. This approach stems from the fields of developmental psychology and constructivism. SEL is also based on a number of theories and literature bases including social-cognitive theory, social problem-solving, moral and emotional development, resilience, self-determination theory, systems/ecological theory, and prevention science.1 SEL is a strengths-based approach, centered on encouraging students’ development of the following key competencies10, 11:

* **Responsible decision-making**—skill in being able to comprehend complex situations and make reasonable and ethical behavioral choices,
* **Self-management**—management and appropriate expression of one’s emotions based on context,
* **Social awareness**—an awareness and understanding of the emotions and actions of others,
* **Relationship development**—skills to be able to successfully initiate, navigate and maintain friendships and supportive relationships,
* and **Self-awareness**—an awareness of one’s emotions and behavioral patterns,

**Implementation.** The application of SEL in schools is varied, but the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) suggests four ways in which SEL might be implemented with examples of what these strategies look like in school settings12. These are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. CASEL’s Strategies, and Examples, for Implementing SEL

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| **SEL Strategy** | **Example Practice** |
| **Free Standing Lessons**—Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit (SAFE) instruction based on 5 SEL competencies | Lessons that teach the competencies above, as found in such evidence-based programs as Second Step, PATHS, and 4Rs. |
| **General Teaching Practices—**Established routines and environmental arrangements that allow for the development and practice of SEL skills | Developing classroom core values, morning meetings, peace corners, cooperative learning, service learning (e.g., Responsive Classroom approach) |
| **Integration of SEL with Academics--** Programming that integrates SEL competency instruction with humanities/literature | Using role-plays, moral discussions, literature, and writing assignments to teach SEL skills for lessons in language arts and social studies (e.g., integrating  *Facing History and Ourselves* into history lessons) |
| **Guidance on Establishing SEL as a Schoolwide Initiative—**Support for administrators and school leaders to initiate and sustain SEL implementation | School-wide visioning, leadership teaming, needs assessment, policy development, curriculum/program selection, professional development planning, data-based decision-making and progress monitoring |

**Evidence Base.** There are numerous SEL programs and approaches available to schools, and many which have demonstrated positive effects on student development. In a 2011 meta-analysis of 213 intervention studies, Durlak and colleagues13 found that SEL interventions implemented in schools resulted in:

* Increases in students’ social emotional skills,
* Increases in positive attitudes about others, self, and school,
* Increases in positive behavior,
* Increases in academic achievement,
* Significant reductions in emotional distress and problem behaviors.

**Why is it important to integrate SWPBIS and SEL?**

There are three primary reasons that explain why it is important for schools to integrate and align SWPBIS and SEL strategies.

1. **Integration could reduce fragmentation and redundancy.** In a research study ofSWPBIS schools, Bradshaw and colleagues found that in addition to implementing the SWPBS approach, the average school was also implementing ***5.1 different programs*** per year that are focused on social and emotional development or character education.7 Many times, these programs overlap in content and differ slightly in intent, and are introduced to students in different classes or settings. Without a unified vision or common language, this fragmentation of programming can be confusing to students and adults or can make it challenging for students to integrate practice of skills across settings throughout the day. Furthermore, this approach to implementation is likely inefficient, taking time unnecessarily away from other school-wide instructional priorities.
2. **SWPBIS and SEL are complementary.** At its foundation, the development of a healthy school climate depends on structured and supportive learning environments in which students learn social skills and follow school rules and behavioral expectations, which is the focus of SWPBIS, and have the opportunity to develop and practice social and emotional competencies, especially those related to self-discipline, as emphasized in an SEL approach.1,14
3. **SWPBIS and SEL in combination can enhance one another.** While there are aspects of SWPBIS and SEL that are similar, there are also significant differences between the two. Some of these differences are promising strategies that, when added into an integrated model, can strengthen the quality and efficiency of practices and student outcomes.1,2

Based on the third reason above, it is important for professionals to understand the strengths and potential pitfalls associated with both SWPBIS and SEL.1

**Strengths of SWPBIS**

* Well-defined strategies for implementing practices in classroom as well as non-classroom areas.
* Clear emphasis and guidelines on structures and systems to enable school-wide implementation (who should be on the leadership team, job-embedded professional development strategies, examples of how to plan for sustainability).
* Well-developed systems for office disciplinary and implementation fidelity data management and use (e.g. [www.pbisapps.org](http://www.pbisapps.org))
* An emphasis on context-specific and culturally relevant strategies.

**Potential Pitfalls of SWPBIS**

* Given short-term aims of SWPBIS for managing behavior school-wide, insufficient emphasis might be placed on the development of social and emotional competencies highlighted in the SEL approach, including those most associated with self-discipline (i.e., responsible decision making, relationship development, social awareness, and self-management).
* There may be an unnecessary, and potentially harmful, overreliance on use of external rewards by adults to manage student behavior.
* While data management and use is well-defined for office disciplinary referral information and implementation fidelity, schools may dismiss the importance of other important data sources, such as students’ perceptions and feelings about their schools. When viewed as a general framework, rather than as the application of strategies of applied behavior analysis, it is difficult to distinguish SWPBIS from other approaches and identify any unique and effective strategies.

**Strengths of SEL**

* Focus is on the development of competencies that will foster mental health wellness, supportive relationships, and self-discipline
* Availability of numerous, evidence-based curricula that help students to learn important skills and awareness of the connection between cognitions, emotions, and behavior
* Availability of a range of classroom structures that support practice of social-emotional strategies

**Potential Pitfalls of SEL**

* Given the multiple theories that drive the development of SEL approaches/curricula, it is sometimes difficult to clearly define the primary objectives of an approach or clearly operationalize and build school-wide consistency around desired strategies.
* Given the focus on the development of internal assets, the effectiveness of external-oriented techniques, including positive reinforcement and punishment, might be overlooked or not valued.
* There are fewer examples of data management systems and data use practices available that are clearly connected to the SEL curricula used or skills taught.

**Research Supporting Integration**

Research supporting the integration of prevention-based programs is in its infancy. Some researchers have proposed conceptual models for integration, while others have begun to study practical examples.

**Conceptual Steps Necessary for Integration**13

* Identify key components of each intervention or approach
* Identify areas that share common aims, goals, and practices
* Identify differences in key components and decide if these can enhance one another or should be modified or negotiated

**Initial Examples of Integration**

* **PATHS to PAX**13**—**A collaboration between the Johns Hopkins Center for Prevention and Early Intervention, the Pennsylvania State University Prevention Research Center, and the Paxis Institute.
  + Integration of **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)** and **PAX-GBG**
  + **PATHS** is an evidence-based SEL curriculum focused on all five CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills).
  + **PAX-GBG** is an updated version of the **G**ood **B**ehavior **G**ame, originally developed by a classroom teacher in the 1960’s15, with years of research supporting its use. It is an example of an interdependent classroom contingency system in which students are taught and rewarded for meeting classroom behavioral expectations.
  + **Integration Strategies**
    - **Consider two approaches as one.** Researchers conceptualized the new approach to be one model consisting of three parts including lessons, activities and practice. PATHS represented the lessons and activities, and PAX-GBG was considered to be the skill practice opportunity for students.
    - **Develop one set of training materials.** These were not presented as two separate approaches, rather a set of materials to work from.
    - **Look for overlapping structures and create a common language and guidance for consistent implementation.** In this case, “compliments” were given through “tootles” in PAX and “Kid of the Day” in PATHS. Researchers worked to combine these strategies. Further, researchers provided suggestions for how to incorporate visual cues available with each program.
    - **Monitoring Implementation.** Tools were developed for teachers to monitor their use of the integrated program and for coaches’ to observe teacher implementation.
  + **Results**
    - Prior to implementation, 588 minutes per week of instructional time were lost to problem behaviors. Following implementation, there was a net gain of 391 minutes of instructional time per week, which equals about 26 days per school year.
* **Strong Kids and SWPBIS**16**—**A collaboration between the University of Washington and Louisiana State University.
  + **Strong Kids** is a brief SEL program aimed at teaching the five CASEL competencies and has a wide range of supporting research that suggests increases in student skill development and decreases in depression and anxiety.
  + **CW-PBIS** is a **c**lass**w**ide application of the Tier 1 practices noted in Table 2.
  + **Integration.** This example is from one study in which classrooms either implemented “business as usual,” SEL, SWPBIS , or SEL + SWPBIS
    - Combination of SEL and SWPBIS was highly effective for decreasing both externalizing (e.g. disruptive behaviors) and internalizing (e.g. depression, anxiety) behavior.
    - PBIS was highly effective for externalizing behaviors and only slightly effective for internalizing behaviors.
    - SEL was highly effective for externalizing behaviors and moderately effective for internalizing behaviors.

**Primary Considerations and Recommendations for Effective Schoolwide Integration**

Initial research for integration of SWPBIS and SEL is promising; however, most examples to date have been specific to integration at the classroom level. Below are explicit recommendations for integrating at a school-wide level. The premise is that the tiered framework associated with SWPBIS is the guiding framework and SEL practices and approaches are integrated within each tier. Further, the four-part outcomes, systems, data, and practices model from the SWPBIS framework and the school-wide systems considerations identified in the SEL literature are incorporated throughout the recommendations. The following are based on Bradshaw and colleagues’ 2 proposed 11-step approach to integration and our own experiences with integration efforts.

1. **Commit to coordinated implementation of SWPBIS & SEL.** For a school or district to effectively integrate efforts, it is critical that school leaders support and thoroughly understand each effort and the benefits of an integrated approach. Further, school leaders must be able to set the vision for this effort and devote energy and resources to it. Most often, this includes insuring that this commitment is visible to district personnel (e.g. administrators, school board) and that external support is accessed to help with visioning, professional development, and ongoing technical assistance.
2. **Obtain staff/school community buy-in for SWPBIS & SEL.** Often times, we have worked in schools where staff are familiar with SWPBIS or SEL approaches but have a hard time envisioning an integrated model in which they may have to implement an extended, adapted, or negotiated version of what they know. It is important for staff to understand the key features, strengths, and weaknesses of both models so that an integrated version is a logical transition that they are able to commit to. This requires adequate professional development opportunities (see below for more on this).
3. **Engage stakeholders to form a team.** Distributed leadership is key to the effective diffusion and sustainability of a school-wide initiative. 17 The SWPBIS literature very clearly suggests that a team of 6-8 individuals, representative of the school community, share in the planning and monitoring of schoolwide SWPBIS.3 This team should include an administrator, a person with behavioral expertise, specialists, special education teachers, grade level representation, parent, student, etc.

For a truly integrated model, we suggest that schools think very carefully about their team. For example, if there are master SEL teachers (e.g. Responsive Classroom trainers), they certainly should be on the team, as should school counselors, school psychologists, and physical education or health teachers that are involved in SEL efforts, such as bullying prevention, and typically see every student in the building.

The SWPBIS literature has defined the role of a “coach,” or someone who facilitates the team process.3 This is an important role, and in this case, needs to be someone who can articulate the integration well and keep others on track with program planning and implementation. Thus, if a coaching model is followed, the coach should be knowledgeable and experienced with both the SWPBIS and SEL approaches, and committed to their integration.

1. **Develop a shared vision for an integrated SEL & SWPBIS model.** Teams and school communities should work together to identify what they want their school climate and culture to “look like.” For example, teachers, students, and parents engage in activities where they identify on post-it notes how they want to be treated by others, what types of rules or expectations are important, etc. Then, the team engages in a process in which they sort post-it notes into categories. The 3-5 categories then become the school’s core values or schoolwide expectations. An alternative would be for schools to draw their 3-5 expectations from the language presented in their SEL curriculum or approach. For example, in the Responsive Classroom approach (see [www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)), students learn about CARES (cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control). This language can be a natural point of integration for schools that are simultaneously implementing SWPBIS and the Responsive Classroom approach, providing for the use of a common language schoolwide.

Engaging in this visioning process can help schools define the outcomes that they are aiming to achieve, which will also help to define which measurement tools will be most important to assess school outcomes as well to monitor progress toward obtaining them.

1. **Conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to integrate SWPBIS & SEL implementation.** To create a planful integration approach that is authentic to a school’s individual culture, it is important to understand what programming is already in place, how well it is working, and what barriers exist.

One way to evaluate current structures is for the team to literally map out on paper all social-emotional and behavioral programming, strengths of that programming, gaps, areas where there are common features between programs, and current barriers to effective implementation (see Appendix A for a mapping activity).

It is also helpful to obtain the perspectives of the school community at this point to best understand global perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in school climate. For example, the Delaware School Surveys18, which assess school climate, bullying victimization, student engagement, and social and emotional competencies can be used at this point to understand student, teacher, and caregiver perceptions of the extent to which the school has adequate structures in place (e.g. fair rules) and supportive relationships.

Evaluation results from those external to the school also may be of value. For example, the Delaware Key Features Evaluation is completed by an external team when visiting a school; the team interviews teachers, students, administrators, and other staff; and reviews documentation of implementation. The purpose is to provide an unbiased external assessment of fidelity of implementation and effectiveness in integrating SWPBIS and SEL practices.

1. **Carefully select SWPBIS & SEL programming and develop decision-making guidelines.** To develop a needs-based integration plan, it is necessary to not only conduct a SWOT analysis but to also have an idea of preferred student outcomes and student needs. If the goal is to reduce disciplinary referrals, then placing emphasis on teaching rules and routines would be helpful. If increases in social-emotional assets are the goal, then perhaps more emphasis needs to be placed on teaching activities that foster SEL.

In these schools/districts, it is important that the SWPBIS & SEL team develop timelines and routines for how the data will be managed and used efficiently and develop decision rules for when programming needs to change for the whole school, particular grades or classes, and individual students. For example, a school may collect:

* School climate data—once a year
* Social and emotional competency data—once a year (e.g., using the Social and Emotional Competence Scale of the Delaware School Survey)
* Student engagement data—once a year (e.g., using the Student Engagement Scale of the Delaware School Survey)
* Bullying victimization data—once or twice a year (e.g., using the Bullying Victimization Scale of the Delaware School Survey)
* Counselor Contacts—3 times a year
* Nurse Visits—ongoing
* Disciplinary Referrals—ongoing
* Attendance—ongoing

Schools might also consider using social-emotional screening data, obtained by administering a validated measure that serves such purposes (see appendix A). However, if used, active or passive parental consent is likely required.

When initially creating an integration plan, it is likely most efficient to start with data that are already available and then build in other data sources as the team deems necessary and helpful.

1. **Create an integration action plan.** Developing a comprehensive action plan, or road map is perhaps most important. This will help the school/district to stay on track with its goals and implementation. See Appendix C for an action plan template that is based on Bradshaw and colleagues’ recommendations below:

* Develop a statement of purpose. This should include why it is important to integrate efforts, how current or new integration efforts will help the school to achieve positive and relevant student outcomes.
* Articulate systems and procedures for selecting practices, implementing practices, and monitoring implementation and outcomes.
  + Create visuals to help teachers and staff to easily use a common language. See the example SWPBIS & SEL crosswalk and continuum for handling challenging behaviors in (Appendix C)
  + Develop implementation measures that will allow individuals to reflect on procedural fidelity and quality of implementation. [www.pbisapps.org](http://www.pbisapps.org) has a great deal of SWPBIS -related implementation tools. These include walkthrough observations and interviews and team-completed checklists (e.g. the School-wide Evaluation Tool, the Tiered Fidelity Inventory). See example in appendices of how to adapt tools to incorporate SEL principles.
  + Explicitly state strategies for obtaining faculty buy-in and for ensuring that new faculty are oriented each year.
  + State expectations for members of the team, as well as for faculty and staff. Clarify how channels of communication will work so that team has a mechanism for sharing new implementation strategies and faculty and staff have a mechanism for providing feedback and ideas.
  + Establish procedures for using fidelity data and outcome data to make decisions about implementation and program effectiveness.
  + Develop an implementation timeline that allows all to understand when particular lessons should be taught or refreshed and other activities are to be implemented. This should also incorporate a routine or strategy for making changes to implementation based on regular observation of data.

1. **Develop job-embedded professional development activities.** Creating and implementing an effective and efficient integrated model of SEL & SWPBIS requires that all faculty and staff have a shared understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of the model and the practical application. Typically, it is helpful for teams to plan for ongoing professional development activities that happen within the context of the school day and not at one-day training. The most successful schools are those that function as professional learning communities and have developed structures to support ongoing learning.

For example, schools might take a small portion of every faculty meeting to share relevant student or implementation data and give an update on SEL & SWPBIS practices. They might identify the focus for implementation improvements by having staff complete “exit tickets” at the end of each faculty meeting. These tickets allow staff to give targeted feedback on what is going well and where staff are struggling.

Alternatively, schools might develop routines for grade level teachers to have shared planning time. During this time, a routine is established where teachers can look at grade level data (e.g. disciplinary data, nurse visits) to identify grade level concerns, to problem solve class-wide implementation, etc.

New teacher orientation structures may also serve as potentially powerful means for faculty to access job-embedded professional development. Some districts have incorporated monthly meetings for early career or new teachers. A portion of each of these meetings could be devoted to troubleshooting and learning about the implementation of an integrated SWPBIS & SEL plan.

1. **Launch SWPBIS & SEL together.** While many schools have SWPBIS or SEL or both frameworks in place, many do not “launch” these efforts together, making it hard for students to draw connections between the efforts. In developing an integrated action plan and supports for faculty and staff to implement the plan, it becomes easier and more logical for a yearly “launch” or planned booster sessions that happen schoolwide, to be integrated as well.
2. **Develop an on-going technical assistance plan.** Implementing a schoolwide initiative, such as an integrated model of SWPBIS & SEL is hard work and requires schools to “build the plane while flying it.” To do this well, schools often need to develop a plan for technical assistance. Technical assistance can be provided by an external consultant, with skills in both SWPBIS & SEL or can be offered by an internal “expert” or instructional coach. A technical assistance plan should be jointly developed between the school team and the technical assistant and might include the content, timeline, and format of assistance that the school will need to build the capacity for implementation of sustainable and effective practices. See a sample technical assistance plan in Appendix D. While building-based technical assistance is important, it is similarly important for districts or states to have a clearly articulated plan to help execute a larger district or statewide vision for integrated SWPBIS & SEL.
3. **Use data in an ongoing way to evaluate programming.** Data should drive all actions taken. As stated previously, it will likely be important for more than one data source to be used to make decisions about program planning and implementation. It is important to develop an efficient set of routines for collecting, managing, and using data in a way to make school-wide, grade level, classroom, and individual student decisions. Furthermore, use of fidelity data to understand feasibility and quality of implementation is important to review regularly. Use of data by SWPBIS teams has been predictive of implementation16—clearly this is important.

Furthermore, it is important sometimes to think about data more informally. For example, we have worked in schools where team members have said, “We know we are doing something right when the line outside of the principal’s door is shorter.” While it is important to have clear and formal systems for using data, it is also equally important to draw upon more “qualitative” sources of information.

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