

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Imbedded Into Children's

Promise School Bus Driver Training

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### **Introduction**

Much research has been published on the topic of bullying, but little of this research focuses on school bus driver training. Training school bus drivers in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) will likely reduce incidents of student-to-student conflict on school buses. The purpose of this manuscript is to explain how educational administrators and school bus managers may use a phased training strategy to decrease student conflict on their school buses. The strategy being developed through this project is the basis for a future Train-the-Trainer model. The educational nonprofit Children's Promise is the only nonprofit in Wisconsin whose primary focus is positive school climate/anti-bullying training. Founded in 2001, Children's Promise student, educator, parent and school bus professional training has impacted over 28,500 students.

What is bullying? "Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically it is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms such as hitting or punching (physical bullying); also intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal or emotional bullying)" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). "Bullying may very well be the most prevalent form of school violence in the United States. While specific studies have revealed rates ranging from a low of 10 percent to a high of 75 percent of school-age children who report being bullied at least once during their school years, most studies indicate that approximately 15 to 20 percent of students will experience bullying at some point from kindergarten through high school graduation" (State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Bully Prevention Curriculum, 2007).

The National Education Association surveyed teachers and education support staff

about bullying. The study concluded that even though bullying policies may exist in districts, there is lack of training on how to implement these policies. Also, all staff members need this training (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan and Gulemetova, 2013). Ellen deLara conducted an exploratory study about bullying and aggression on school buses, which recorded driver observations and suggestions. deLara's work is important, in that there is almost no academic work published in peer reviewed journals on school bus driver training.

### **Relevance to Social Work**

Social workers' extensive knowledge make them natural leaders in bringing relevant training to front-line educational personnel, such as bus drivers. This matters since the school bus can be a hot spot for bullying, if bus drivers are not adequately supported by student services and administrative staff.

### **Literature**

School buses are often a hot spot for bullying, and it is necessary to address that research gap. Involvement on the part of adults (Olweus 1994, 1986) is key to an effective anti-bullying program. Olweus anti-bullying research is considered to be the gold standard for anti-bullying research on the world-wide stage. Olweus accomplished outstanding research in a technical realm and was deeply informed on the topic. He also had access to a very large sample, in that some students committed suicide in his home country of Norway in short succession, building national support for action steps to increase student safety. Olweus' teaching is found commonly in U.S. schools, but in the larger picture often is not used because of the time/resource intensity of Olweus programming. It is imperative to build on the historic success of Olweus' research. Ttofi and Farrington propose that we need to study which strengthened Olweus mechanisms yield the most successful results (Ttofi

and Farrington 2009, 23). “According to Huberman (1983), teacher education programs that have engaged in extensive networking and dialogue with area schools regarding the design of innovations that serve a significant need have been more effective in leading educational reform...” (Warford, 2005, p. 10). Addressing the macro perspective, U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, specifies in the document *Guiding Principles* six action steps to foster positive school climate:

1. Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates
2. Prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports
3. Promote social and emotional learning
4. Provide regular training and supports to all school personnel
5. Collaborate with local agencies and other stakeholders
6. Ensure that school-based law enforcement officers' roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement

This project specifically advances the implementation of action step #4, *providing training and supports to all school personnel*. There is so much demand on today's educational budgets, often training bus drivers within a district's educational budget is not considered a possibility or priority.

Action step #2 above, *prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies such as tiered supports*, describes well why integrating Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is important. The co-founders of PBIS, Rob Horner and George Sugai, have been working tirelessly to integrate PBIS principles into the social emotional approach recommended on the federal level. PBIS is a proactive approach, supported by evidence-based practice to provide resources and supports for *all* students. Rob Horner's

background is both one of a measurement theorist, and also a focus on special education supports. The PBIS framework is made up of 3 tiers; the primary tier is a school-wide focus to support all students and staff, the secondary level support provides interventions specific to a classroom or group, and the third tier provides more intensive interventions to individuals (Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013). This program also assists schools to provide set consequences to students and utilizing those consequences as a learning opportunity (Dunlop, 2013). In the past schools were reactive to negative behavior. By utilizing PBIS, schools are now able to help avoid new negative behaviors or address existing negative behaviors. PBIS is effective in behavior education because it assists educators and staff on how to foster “appropriate behaviors, positive social skills, and pro-social traits” (Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013, p. 299). “PBIS is being implemented successfully across the nation...School-wide PBIS is experimentally related to a reduction in problem behavior, increased academic performance, increased attendance...improved organizational efficiency...improved Social Emotional competence” (Horner, 2014). “PBIS schools across Wisconsin have created a more positive environment for students and staff by establishing clear expectations for their students and taking active steps in teaching, modeling and reinforcing appropriate behaviors school wide. Wisconsin schools have been implementing PBIS since the Fall of 2006, with rapid growth in the number of trained PBIS schools in Wisconsin. As of July 1, 2014, 1051 schools in 225 districts in Wisconsin have attended PBIS training” (Wisconsin Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports-PBIS Network, 2014).

There is an extensive record of PBIS success nationally, and more recently, also in Wisconsin. There is some information on integrating anti-bullying strategies with

PBIS procedures, but the conversation is at an early stage in that regard. There is almost no academic information on training school bus drivers effectively, and there is no academically published information on training school bus drivers within the PBIS framework.

Do school bus drivers trained within the PBIS framework, using training designed collaboratively with educational leaders by the nonprofit Children's Promise, score higher on the BUSS (Busing Underage Students Safely) survey? Collecting more data on effective school bus driver training, particularly within the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, is essential to advancing positive school climate/anti-bullying research.

## **Methodology**

### **Description of the Sample**

A convenience sample of 52 to 60 school bus drivers and substitute drivers will be trained in positive climate skills. These drivers serve 2,200 kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students within a rural/suburban school district of 3,700 students. Demographic data for this school district's students as most recently reported is: American Indian 2.4%, Asian .9%, Black 1.1%, Hispanic 2.3%, white 91.6% and two or more races 1.6%. Approximately one in four, or 23.1% of the district's students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, a common summary of socioeconomic data for school districts in Wisconsin.

### **Measurements**

The *Busing Underage Students Safely (BUSS)* self-assessment measurement instrument is an adaption of the *Benchmarks of Quality(BoQ)* PBIS measurement

instrument. PBIS measurements are in general based on observable behaviors and are designed to engage the individual taking the survey in the change process. The intent of the survey is to help empower that individual with additional skills that support students. The goal of the BUSS instrument is to adapt the most successful aspects of other PBIS instruments to provide additional support and empowerment to school bus drivers and managers. These school bus professionals for budgetary and cultural reasons, typically have not had access to ongoing training taking place within a school district. The survey consists of 13 Likert-type questions. The survey questions on the BUSS measurement instrument are based on previous exploratory, qualitative Socratic-type teaching sessions with approximately 170 bus drivers estimated as being from over 10 school districts within Wisconsin. The initial BUSS instrument is at the pilot stage, and will need to be modified over time as it is used with larger numbers of school bus drivers. The questionnaire will be given before training, and at a predetermined time after training.

### **Operationalization**

This project is a mixed method quantitative approach, with data operationalized through the BUSS survey and bus incident data. The dependent variable is a decrease in school bus incidents and a higher score for bus driver responses on the BUSS survey, after training. School bus incident report data will be requested from school bus management of participants in this project and is customarily collected by school bus officials. Nominal variables are school bus drivers, school bus managers and associate principals/principals, whoever in this study is responsible for communication with school the bus manager/drivers. The independent variable is PBIS imbedded into Children's Promise school bus driver training. This is an exploratory, quasi-experimental study at a

stage too early to be generalized statistically. Like every quasi-evaluation this project may be difficult to generalize because of the small sample and lack of randomly chosen groups. The intent of the study is to spur further discussion and exploration of what effective school bus driver training within the PBIS framework might look like.

### **Implication**

Since there is little academic research on effective school bus driver training, and no published academic research on incorporating the PBIS framework into school bus driver training, this project--the basis for a future Train-the-Trainer model, will likely ultimately impact students across Wisconsin. If successful teamwork is maintained on this heretofore unexamined subject, bus incidents across Wisconsin will begin to decrease as more Wisconsin districts focus on this part of a student's day.



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