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ABSTRACT

This brief report discusses the outcomes of a study that examined statewide behavioral initiatives (SBI) that involve general education, special education, or both. Forty-three state education agencies (SEAs) responded to a survey that investigated the development of SBI, focus of the SBI, and how well the SBI addresses the needs of students with disabilities. Results of the survey indicate: (1) 26 of the 43 have a statewide initiative in place, and of the 17 without an active initiative, 13 have plans to develop one; (2) 19 of the survey respondents with an SBI reported that the state initiative includes all students, while 7 SEAs focus their SBIs solely on students with disabilities; (3) 15 of the 26 SEAS with active SBIs specifically include the birth to age 5 population; (4) 7 states include preschool children in their SBIs; (5) 23 of the 26 SEAs rated their initiatives as doing very well or adequately meeting their needs; (6) distinguishing features of SBIs included functional behavior assessment, positive behavior support, statewide activities, capacity-building, staff development, collaboration, and state improvement activities; and (7) most SEAs with SBIs have earmarked funds to support implementation. (CR)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, INC.

QUICK TURN AROUND PROJECT FORUM

QTA – A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF A CRITICAL ISSUE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

APRIL 2000

STATEWIDE BEHAVIOR INITIATIVES

By
PATRICE LINEHAN

Quick Turn Around

Project FORUM NASDSE

QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Statewide Behavior Initiatives

April 2000

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Purpose and Definition

As part of its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Project FORUM agreed to support and enhance the work of the National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (the PBIS Center) directed by the University of Oregon by gathering information on statewide behavioral initiatives that involve general education, special education, or both. For the purpose of this inquiry, a ***statewide behavioral initiative (SBI)*** is any formal policy or plan describing the specific components and strategies of a long-term effort (3-5 years) intended to build the capacity of a state or non-state jurisdiction to provide behavioral support to schools.

Survey

Project FORUM conferred with the PBIS Center to develop a six-item survey that was sent to all state education agencies (SEAs) in October. The survey requested information on the following topics:

- Existence or development of an active SBI;
- Years the SBI has been in place;
- Focus of the SBI (i.e., all students, students with disabilities); and
- Self-assessment of how well the SBI addresses the needs of students with disabilities.

The survey participants were also asked to list some distinguishing features or components of the SBI, and the resources that are earmarked to support it. By December 9, 1999, responses had been received from 39 states and four non-state jurisdictions. The survey data are reported below.

Findings

Number of Active SBIs or Plans

Twenty-six of the 43 SEAs that responded to Project FORUM's survey have a statewide initiative in place. Of the 17 without an active initiative, 13 have plans to develop one.

While some states do not have a formal SBI as defined by Project FORUM, they may have policies, technical assistance or staff development activities to provide behavioral support to schools. For example, one state without a formal plan has held statewide conferences in collaboration with other state agencies, issued policy memoranda related to functional behavioral assessments (FBA) and the use of time out rooms, and offered many professional development opportunities (e.g., prevention, support, technical assistance and quality programs).

Number of Years in Effect

Although 26 SEAs have SBIs or plans, 10 of those have been implemented within the last year. (See table below.)

Length of Statewide Behavioral Initiative (N=26)

Years in effect	Number of SEAs
<1	10
2-5	10
6-10	4
>10	2

Arkansas' SBI, which includes a state-wide network of consultants, comprehensive training and collaborative efforts with the Arkansas School Psychologists Association, has been in place for 21 years. Illinois has had an initiative for the past 10 years that includes interagency supports for children and youth provided through local area network planning.

Focus of SBI

SEAs often provide a variety of support (e.g., individual, classroom, building, and district based interventions), but the focus of a particular district varies according to the specific need in that area. For example, Pennsylvania noted that some schools exclusively focus on students with disabilities who present behavior that impedes their learning and/or the learning of others. Other schools, while receiving help in this same area, are most interested in systemic approaches to addressing student behavior.

Nearly three quarters of the survey respondents with an SBI (19 of 26, or 73%) reported that the state initiative includes all students. The remaining seven SEAs (27%) focus their SBI solely on students with disabilities. In some states, specific groups of students are considered the primary focus of the SBI, and others secondary. For example, Arkansas and Texas include all students in the SBI, but focus on students with disabilities. Illinois provides positive behavior intervention support for all students, and has an additional program geared toward students with emotional/behavioral disabilities. Two states noted that they work closely with other agencies to ensure that all students are served through the SBI. Some examples of the agencies involved in these SBIs include: Juvenile Justice, State Youth Commission, State Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, Early Childhood Intervention, and the Juvenile Probation Commission.

Early Childhood

Fifteen of the 26 SEAs with active SBIs specifically include the birth to age five population. For instance, Kentucky has implemented statewide training initiatives focusing on early childhood prevention/ intervention, and Montana holds summer institute sessions that include a strand for Head Start and Early childhood staff focusing on early intervention. The SBI Advisory Council in Montana also includes a Head Start representative and the 619 coordinator for early childhood programs.

Seven states include pre-school (ages 3-5) children in their SBI; although, for this age group, agencies besides the SEA are often involved and may take the lead on SBI activities involving pre-school age children. Funding sources are sometimes combined to expand services to children ages 3-5 through collaborative efforts with the SEA (e.g., Part B funds, university grant funding). In other cases, agencies other than the SEA may take the lead on SBI activities involving pre-school age children. (See table on page 3).

SBIs including Early Childhood Population

N=26	Birth-5 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	6 yrs. And up
Number of SEAs	15	7	4

Needs of Students with Disabilities

When survey respondents were asked to consider how well their SBIs are addressing the needs of students with disabilities, 23 of the 26 SEAs (or 88%) rated their initiatives as doing very well or adequately meeting needs. The other three SEAs (12%) assessed their initiatives as only somewhat meeting the needs of students with disabilities. One state reported that the scope and focus of the initiative was addressing the needs very well, but the supply of qualified personnel to implement the initiative was only adequate.

Features or Components

SEAs were asked to summarize three or four distinguishing features of their SBI. The components generally fell into the following seven categories[1]:

- Functional Behavior Assessment
- Positive Behavior Support
- Statewide activities
- Capacity-building
- Staff development
- Collaboration
- State improvement activities

SEA policies and procedures influence district and school SBIs. At the same time, local implementation must consider many other factors (e.g., school climate, mission, supports) in designing multi-faceted programs to address problem behaviors. In addition to the categories listed above, a sound research base and pro-active technical assistance were cited as essential components in supporting schools and communities considering behavioral strategies and interventions.

Some technical assistance is geared toward specific groups -- such as children at risk of moving to more restrictive settings -- and other technical assistance efforts are viewed as general support to districts for program implementation or improvement. Some states provide detailed guidance, such as sample forms and building-based procedures to local districts implementing SBIs (e.g., Indiana).

Comprehensive networks of technical assistance, as well as tools such as technology, have assisted SEAs in disseminating information on SBIs. Technology is being integrated into many aspects of today's workforce, and SBIs are no exception. Utah and Arizona specifically reported using websites and distance learning training to implement their SBIs.

Seven states also noted the importance of beginning any SBI with a strong research base. Montana uses a process of training, teaming, best practices, data collection, and evaluation to determine the state's direction in setting goals and developing strategies. The process is research-based and tied to school improvement. A few states mentioned that they are receiving federal funding to study the impact of specific components of their SBI (e.g., alternative discipline programs at school site level). The data is collected and analyzed to inform program improvement. At the school-level,

[1] Every effort was made to remain true to the language used by responding SEAs when describing specific features of their initiatives. As a result, there is some overlap among the categories due to the way activities were described by various SEAs.

building data enables staff to set measurable goals for the social growth of students. At the state level, database components are incorporated to measure district and statewide outcomes.

Functional Behavior Assessment

At least three states focus on FBA in their SBI. FBA uses a variety of techniques and strategies to diagnose the underlying causes of problem behaviors (e.g., environmental, social, affective) and identify likely interventions to address them. These states include FBA in all state-level training on behavior (Florida), conduct assessments and provide intervention strategies and follow-up assistance to local teams (Georgia), or contract with others to lead districts through the FBA process (Idaho with University of Idaho).

Positive Behavior Support

Four states specifically mentioned using positive behavior support (PBS) and/or intervention strategies. Florida and Nevada conduct training and support implementation of PBS. SEAs stressed the importance of using a continuum of services for identifying and addressing individual behaviors. Assessments and interventions can then be adjusted to appropriately address the needs of individuals, and inform program development. At least one state also requires written plans for some students.

Statewide Activities

Statewide institutes or academies designed to help implement the SBI can be found in at least 10 SEAs. Some address the needs of specific school populations, such as students with autism or emotional behavioral disabilities. Others have a network of state behavior consultants that provide technical assistance to school districts regarding effective intervention/programming for students with behavior problems. According to states, these networks of consultants provide comprehensive, consistent training across the state.

State-level coordination of training differs depending on the administrative structure in the state. Some training is conducted at state and regional levels. Other states use intermediate units and/or instructional support centers. In some states, the focus is strategic planning. Information clearinghouses and coordinated dissemination of information on behavior and services for students with disabilities were also mentioned by survey participants.

Capacity-building

Capacity-building is one of the more popular approaches to carrying out SBIs, according to at least 12 SEAs. Statewide capacity building is intended to support the implementation of a continuum of positive behavior initiatives in all state public schools. For example, in Colorado local teams are trained in all areas of behavior and then act as behavior evaluation and support teams, working at the district and building levels. There are also 20 teams across the state that provide student and family support as part of SBI implementation.

Capacity-building teams seek to involve a variety of educational stakeholders in the SBI process in at least five states. In Illinois, parents and families are encouraged to contribute to the SBI planning process. Others report a broad base of involvement with stakeholder groups, community asset building, and interagency and community support as special features of their SBIs.

Local school and community capacity building is generally undertaken through local teams using a train-the-trainer approach. Some states, such as Iowa, use intermediate agencies to select local sites, and assist with capacity-building and technical assistance. School-based teams in Indiana involve general education and other groups (e.g., administration) that may not have been collaborating on prior state initiatives. Specialized programs, such as the Illinois program focusing on students with an emotional/behavioral disability, build local school and community capacity to maintain children in non-residential placements where appropriate.

Staff Development

Although similar to statewide activities and capacity-building in many ways, professional development is a key component within a number of state initiatives. Summer institutes, conferences, mentoring, partnerships, and other professional development opportunities were highlighted by several survey respondents with SBIs. In Montana, school and community representatives form site teams that are trained annually through presentations by nationally recognized experts. The site teams and facilitators then try to enhance attitudes, skills and systems as they disseminate information on the SBI.

Rhode Island conducts statewide professional development on FBA and PBS. Multi-session demonstration and mentoring in PBS strategies are done on-site throughout districts. Arizona also has mentor-like follow-up for teachers who participate in such SBI training. While several states emphasize the use of comprehensive professional development models, the participants vary across states. In Utah, the school and classroom models of training (with materials and follow-up support) include both regular and special education. South Carolina has a building-based program which includes everyone assigned to the school (e.g., transportation, para-professionals and food services).

West Virginia uses a train-the-trainer format to address the needs of students with disabilities through its SBI. All the necessary materials are incorporated in a training kit that includes four training modules: FBA, behavior intervention plans, social skills, and legal issues.

Some states combine many approaches. For instance, Kentucky noted a professional development series that includes several conference strands, partnerships with other state groups for providing professional development, and a three-day summer behavior institute that covers comprehensive behavior issues. In Delaware, the SBI project uses a train-the-trainer model to provide multi-tiered staff development. In tier one, a cadre of state level representatives are trained by nationally-recognized experts. Tier two involves project co-facilitators from the SEA and the University of Delaware who work with state team members, and university and national experts to develop a year-long modular training series for school districts. Intense follow-up and technical assistance is provided during tier three implementation.

Collaboration

A number of SEAs emphasize the benefits of collaborative partnerships in carrying out their SBIs. Partnerships include universities, advocacy groups, general education associations, related child service systems, and federally-funded research programs.

Arizona and Idaho both collaborate with institutes of higher education (IHEs) as part of their state initiatives. Arizona focuses on inservice, preservice and graduate courses offered through two universities. In Idaho, the University coordinates the SBI project, and hires consultants to lead districts through FBA and behavior plans. The SEA and IHE each contribute 50 percent of the project costs.

Interagency collaboration can be useful in addressing the needs of the most difficult students. Local, regional, and state agencies are using it to provide comprehensive support for some SBIs. Some states are joining related mental health and family involvement initiatives and activities (e.g, Rhode Island, New Mexico). Others have formed partnerships to create a multi-level planning and intervention framework for service delivery. For example, Kentucky works with the Center for School Safety to promote and create demonstration sites for pro-active school-wide instructional discipline models to prevent and reduce behavior problems. In New Mexico, the SEA is spearheading an interagency effort to obtain funding to help support the efforts of a mental health initiative that is led by the State Health Department.

Some state initiatives feature cooperative work between special and general education partner associations. In Missouri, principal associations, safe school centers, and regional professional development centers come together to implement the SBI. In other states, advocacy groups, (e.g., Autism Society, School Psychologist Association) assist with implementation of the SBI, and sometimes pool funds to accomplish overlapping goals.

Linkages have also been made to federal initiatives such as participation in grant-funded collaborative projects between states (e.g., Tri-state Consortium, Regional Collaborative), while other SEAs work closely with the PBIS Center. In one state, SBI efforts are connected with university affiliated programs and other service providers (e.g., developmental services, adult services). At least two SEAs are involved with the Great Lakes Area Regional Resource Center (GLARRC) to address behavior initiatives through an OSEP grant.

In addition to the many collaborative partnerships occurring within states, efforts have been made to align SBIs with other local and state initiatives. SBI goals are coordinated with building-specific improvement plans mandated by state legislatures', and at least three states tie their SBI to the state improvement plans (SIP). For example, Michigan's initiative is aligned with the SIP, state board of education goals and GLARRC behavior initiatives.

SIG Activities

Three states are addressing SBIs as part of state improvement grant (SIG) activities. Alabama is piloting a program that involves general education teachers who work with all disability groups, and collaborates with the Autism Society. Virginia is developing a clearinghouse on behavior. Also, one state that does not yet have an active SBI, has plans to build capacity with local districts through the use of SIG funding.

Allocation of Resources

According to Project FORUM's survey results, most SEAs with a SBI have earmarked funds to support implementation. Twenty-three of 26 SEAs, or 88 percent, noted some type of financial support for theinitiative. Although the survey did not ask for specific amounts, some respondents

offered this information. Funding allocations vary greatly and the amount of money assigned to SBIs did not necessarily relate to the size of the state or specific student demographics. Fourteen responding SEAs allocate staff positions to their SBI, ranging from one part-time employee to 3.5 full-time employees. Three states noted that they planned to reallocate funds or positions, and one is seeking additional funds to support the SBI.

Interest in SBIs

Of the 17 survey respondents without an active SBI, 17 SEAs expressed an interest in learning more about SBI strategies in other states. Sixteen had some interest in learning more about other state strategies, and another state, which already has a SBI, is interested in what other states are doing in this area.

Final Remarks

As was demonstrated by Project FORUM's survey data and the profiles in this document, states are using a number of approaches to developing and implementing SBIs. The states identified in this document were cited to serve as examples of the various ways that states are addressing this issue. It is hoped that the range of options described serves as a useful guide to other states considering the development of a SBI. In addition, the information provided by participating SEAs will guide The PBIS Center in their future activities.

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