

## Winter 2023 Report

### Introduction

The VTPBIS State Team reports three times a year on its progress in the areas of reach, process, capacity, fidelity, and outcomes of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in Vermont's schools. This report covers July 1, 2022 through Dec. 30, 2022.

Previously, this report focused solely on systems, data, and practices of PBIS. However, due to growing concerns about students, staff, and families/caregivers' social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) learning and well-being as well as the increased awareness and need for mental health (MH) support, these reports will now expand to include all of what the Building Effective Supports for Teaching (BEST) Project offers. All training, technical assistance, and coaching, is still offered within a PBIS multi-tiered framework for the highest chance for sustainability. The BEST Project, funded by the VT Agency of Education, continues to foster collaborative relationships with schools and community partners and recognizes the interconnectedness of various SEL initiatives, programs, and

practices. This report and the new BEST Project/VTPBIS logo reflect this intentional connection.

## Process

Within this report, we include the following quantitative and qualitative data as part of the evaluation of implementation efforts:

- To measure the **reach** of the BEST Project in Vermont, we report on:
  - Number of schools/districts implementing or exploring PBIS
- To evaluate our **process** of training schools in Vermont, we report on:
  - Number of trainings offered by the BEST Team
  - Number of training participants
  - Training satisfaction rates
  - Qualitative feedback provided from our training attendees
  - New resources created or curated by the BEST team
- To evaluate our **capacity**, we report on:
  - Number of VTPBIS TAs, coaches, and trainers
  - Number of schools that have connected with a coach
  - Special projects and grants the BEST Project works on
- To evaluate the **fidelity** to the PBIS implementation process, we report on:
  - The measures that schools are required to complete annually, which are:
    - Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI)
    - Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) and/or School Climate Survey (SCS)
  - These measures will be reported on in the annual report.
- To evaluate **outcomes**, we report on:
  - Use of the School-wide Information System (SWIS) equity reports
  - Current context of challenges related to assessing outcomes and state-wide acknowledgments.

## Results

As our education system continues to evolve in the fourth year of the pandemic, the BEST Project continues to meet schools where they are. We provided relevant professional development to meet the needs of schools during these challenging times. We shared updated resources to support students, staff, and families/caregivers' social, emotional, and behavioral well-being. VTPBIS Technical Assistance providers and coaches have also been actively helping meet the unique needs identified by schools. We are building our capacity through collaboration with colleagues in restorative approaches, Project AWARE, and Early MTSS/Pyramid Model.

## Reach

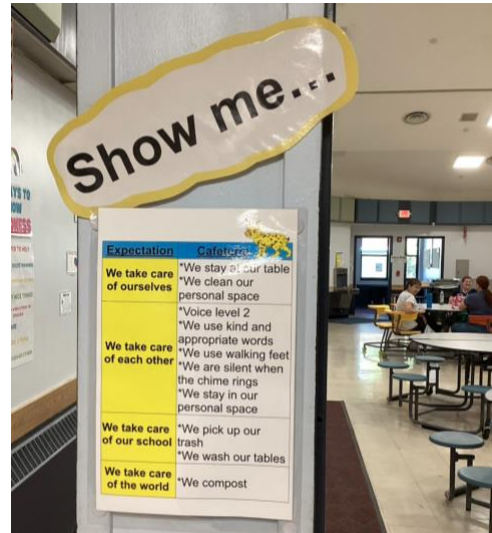
The BEST Project/VTPBIS Team currently supports [167 schools in 48 Supervisory Unions/Districts \(SU/SDs\)](#) to implement PBIS with the goal of achieving social, emotional, behavioral, and academic success for all students. This fall, two new schools rolled out PBIS at the Universal level and 14 schools have expressed interest in attending our core PBIS trainings this spring or summer. After the challenges of the past few years, many are hoping to shore up current practices by attending [Refreshing, Enhancing, and Deepening Universal PBIS](#).

Founders Memorial School, recently trained at the Universal level, had this to say about their implementation so far:

“We are seeing big changes in our school after implementing PBIS. Perhaps the most impactful change is that we are, for the first time, using consistent and common language across the school. Having common language to describe voice levels, clear expectations in all building locations, and an emphasis on positive acknowledgements has truly been transformative. Our school feels calm. In addition, we have included students this year in decision-making and many of our systems, and we are seeing the results.

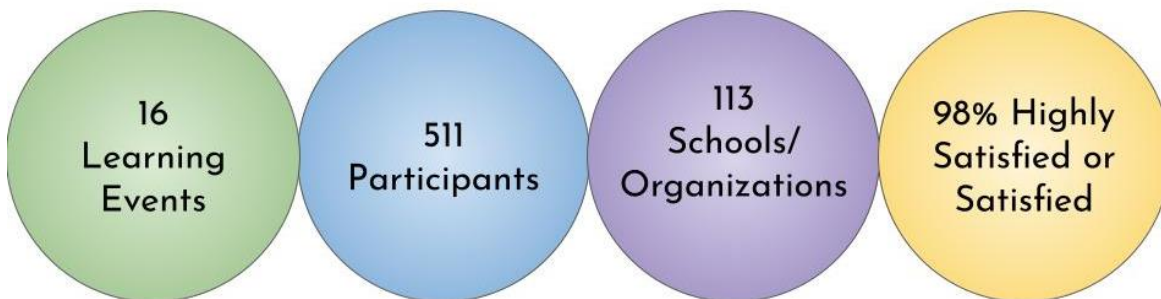
Students have claimed ownership of our school community, which is powerful.”

New schools often see some immediate changes after rolling out PBIS and continue to see changes as implementation grows and becomes more a part of the fabric of the school. The photos below show some ways PBIS is showing up at Founders this fall.



## Process

The BEST Team is charged with developing and delivering high-quality professional learning opportunities in PBIS systems, data, and practices, along with other social, emotional, and mental health topics. All participants are asked to complete a post-learning evaluation to measure their satisfaction. The BEST Team and the presenter(s) review the data from each learning event as part of our continuous improvement process. These events consistently yield very high rates of participant satisfaction.



So far this year, 511 people representing 113 schools/organizations have attended 16 learning events with an average participant satisfaction rate of 98% highly satisfied or satisfied. Professional learning opportunities and topics can be viewed on the [VTPBIS calendar](#). New offerings this year included Utilizing De-escalation Strategies for Paraeducators; Understanding and Identifying Social/Emotional/Behavioral Data Webinar; and Utilizing De-escalation Strategies to Maintain Least Restrictive Environments.

The keystone professional development activity of the fall is the [annual VTPBIS Forum](#). Over 101 people from 56 schools attended this October event to share and learn new ideas. This year's conference featured a very well-received and inspiring [keynote presentation](#) by Gertrude Chamberlin principal Holly Rouelle ("Connections, Care, and Commitment – A PBIS Team Approach to Student and Staff Success"), as well as 16 workshops sessions and five Q+A sessions. Participants from the Forum said this about it:

"She was clear, provided excellent resources, and was easy to connect with. LOVED it!"

"This session was so rejuvenating and therapeutic. Just what I needed for self-care."

"It was super helpful and eye opening to see all the connections being made with PBIS and mental health."

"This was very powerful for me in my new role in the district and gave me knowledge and confidence to move forward."

To sustain the delivery of high-quality professional learning opportunities and to be responsive to local and statewide needs, the BEST Project/VTPBIS Team meets with technical assistance providers monthly to review data, examine relevant research, and identify strategies to gather input from the field. In December, the BEST Project/VTPBIS Team developed a [survey designed to](#) ascertain professional development and learning needs, including various topics and modalities of

professional learning opportunities. The results of the survey were reviewed and action steps were developed to meet the needs of schools across Vermont.

The BEST Project/VTPBIS Team hosted two state leadership team meetings with a variety of invested partners/stakeholders to collaborate on interagency initiatives and align efforts to disseminate information to the field regarding best practices in supporting the social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) learning of all. In preparation for the BEST/VTmtss Summer Institute to be held June 26-29, 2023, the BEST Project has held three Summer Institute Planning Committee meetings and [registration](#) is set to launch March 8th, 2023.

The BEST Project also convenes a group of state-wide trainers to discuss best practices for professional development and how to expand the capacity of trainers within the state. BEST Project staff stay current with active legislative priorities and changes that affect SEB learning and mental health. Co-Directors, Cassandra Townshend and Amy Wheeler-Sutton were [invited to testify](#) (video) in the Vermont House Education Committee on the [Final Report of the Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments](#) (.pdf). They also stay current by attending relevant professional development opportunities such as the [National PBIS Leadership Forum in Chicago](#) and a [virtual MTSS Summit](#) hosted by Branching Minds, along with many webinars and community of practice opportunities. They are also active members of the Northeast PBIS Advisory Group and the National State PBIS Leaders Network.

## Capacity

### Technical Assistance and Coaching

With five [Technical Assistance \(TA\) providers](#), schools and SU/SDs have timely access to support and resources. TAs connect with their region's SU/SD and School Coordinators through a monthly Friendly Reminder email. This practice promotes connections between TAs and school teams and supports the sustainability of effective PBIS implementation.

TAs provided a variety of supports for schools, including Learning Walks and support in planning for annual PBIS assessments. The on-site Learning Walk aims to do an in depth assessment of the current level of PBIS fidelity and action plan to strengthen and sustain PBIS.

Some schools and SU/SDs help bridge the gap between professional learning and PBIS implementation by working with one of the 10 [VTPBIS coaches](#). So far this year, at least 20 schools have contacted coaches to develop a scope of work that will help them improve PBIS systems, data, and practices. While we are not yet to pre-pandemic numbers of schools accessing coaching, this number continues to grow each year as schools continue their recovery.

### RISE-VT Project

The BEST Project, in collaboration with UP for Learning, coordinated the delivery of training and technical assistance on Restorative Approaches (RA) in schools and school districts (SDs). The project, RISE-VT (**R**estorative Approaches **I**mplementation for **S**chool **E**quity in Vermont), funded by the Agency of Education (AOE), officially began on November 22, 2021 and the work concluded in January 2023. The team selected four sites (either school or SDs) that had already begun implementing Restorative Approaches. The Coordination Team, consisting of Lindsey Halman from UP for Learning, Amy Wheeler-Sutton and Valerie Wood, from the VTPBIS Project and the University of Vermont (UVM), worked with the [Vermont Restorative Approaches Collaborative \(VTRAC\)](#) to match sites to RA trainers and coaches. The RA trainers and coaches supported the four sites in deepening their knowledge and application of Restorative Approaches. The project also involved forming a Community of Practice, creating an e-learning module, documentation and ethnography efforts, and convening the VTRAC.

More details about the project's accomplishments can be found [in the final report](#) (.pdf).

## Project AWARE

As part of Project AWARE, a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant awarded to the AOE, the BEST Project continues to participate in a project to support three supervisory unions in building an Interconnected Systems Framework. With consultation and support from national PBIS experts, VTPBIS provides training, technical assistance, and coaching on strategies to enhance PBIS with mental health support across the home, school, and community. The three LEAs participating in Project AWARE have established District Community Leadership Teams (DCLTs) to 1) identify and manage priorities for change; 2) develop and adapt roles of mental health clinicians to meet the needs across a continuum of supports; and 3) build student and family voice into their existing systems. This fall, two professional learning events were held for DCLTs and data crosswalks were shared with schools to help identify strengths and areas for growth. As the project comes to a close, DCLTs and schools are considering which elements of Project AWARE they want to sustain and how they will do so.

## Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS)

Beginning in July of 2022, the BEST Project has partnered with the national Pyramid Model Consortium and local Pyramid 802 Plus to provide Early MTSS Professional Development, funded by the AOE. The project involves establishing a State Early MTSS Leadership Team, providing support and getting input from the Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS) team at the AOE, providing professional development for administrators, educators, and providers, along with providing technical assistance and coaching. The BEST Project has an intentional eye on alignment between Early MTSS/Pyramid Model and school-age PBIS. The BEST Project is also involved in the introduction of the Pyramid Model Implementation Data System (PIDS) that will be critical to the scale up and sustainability of the Pyramid Model in Vermont.



## Fidelity

All VTPBIS schools are expected to complete fidelity assessments at least once per year. This year, schools are being asked to complete the [Tiered Fidelity Inventory \(TFI\)](#) at each level of implementation by the end of March. The TFI is an efficient and effective validated measure to assess the fidelity of core PBIS features at all three tiers. Categories of the assessment include Teams, Implementation, and Evaluation. Results will allow school leadership teams to prioritize actions for change. Two schools in Vermont piloted the TFI 3.0, which aligns with current training and guidance specifically with respect to equity, mental health and wellness integration, and classroom supports. The BEST Project/VTPBIS State Team is excited for other schools to experience the new TFI.

For the second year in a row, schools have a choice between completing the [Self-Assessment Survey \(SAS\)](#) or the [School Climate Survey](#) (or both, if they prefer). The SAS is intended to assess staff perceptions around what PBIS features are in place and which areas are needed for improvement. The School Climate Survey can be administered to staff, students, and/or families. It measures school connectedness, school safety, peer/adult relationships, and more. Robust data from the School Climate Survey can be used by school teams as a check-in to understand to what extent staff, students, and families feel connected and engaged in their learning environments, despite the ongoing stressors in education.

The results of the TFI, SAS, and/or School Climate Survey are used by schools to develop an annual action plan for PBIS sustainability. Aggregated results will also help guide the professional development offerings of the VTPBIS State Team. These results will be published in the annual VTPBIS Report.

## Outcomes

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the BEST Project/VTPBIS State Team has struggled to determine the most accurate way of assessing PBIS-related outcomes. According to the [PBIS Evaluation Blueprint](#) published by the National

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, schools implementing PBIS with fidelity should show desired changes in student outcomes such as discipline rates, academic achievement, graduation rates, SEB outcomes, student satisfaction, equity, staff retention, etc. Since 2020, while we have encouraged completing the TFI (see above), completion rates are lower than pre-pandemic. In an effort to encourage schools to complete the assessment rather than worry about a low score reflecting poorly on them, the BEST Project/VTPBIS State Team has not published TFI scores for schools since 2020.

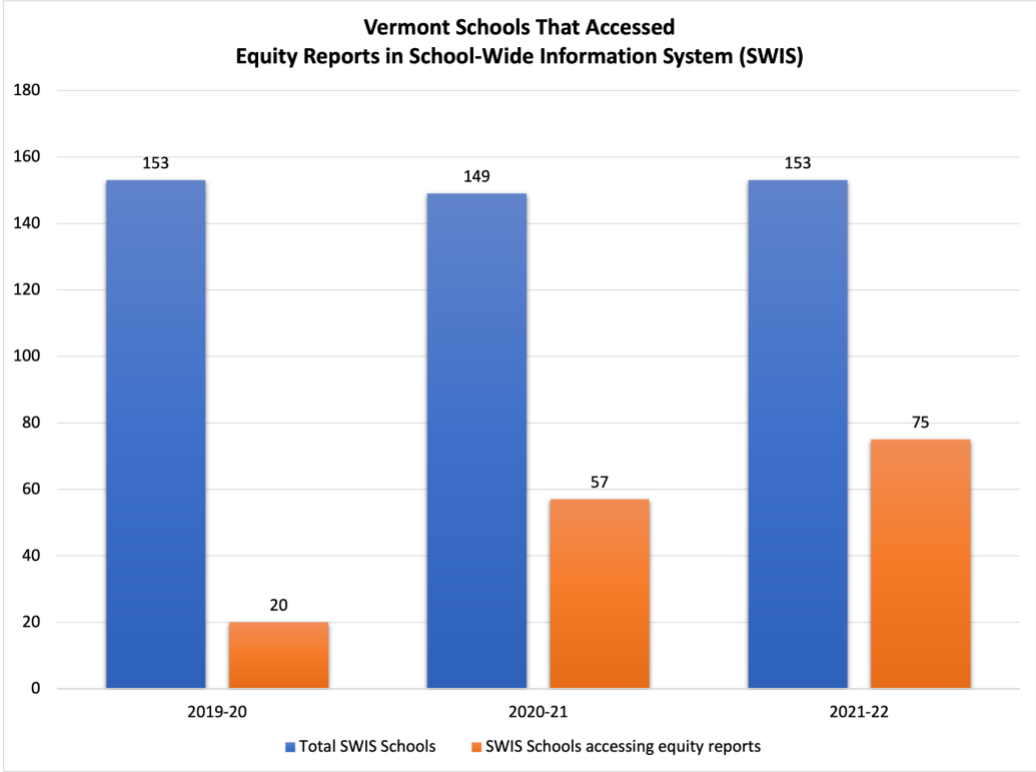
Therefore, it is difficult to determine which schools are implementing with fidelity, and even more difficult to determine whether their strong PBIS implementation is leading to desired student outcomes. Decision rules regarding discipline rates vary greatly between schools (i.e. what is considered a “minor” behavior in one school may be considered a “major” behavior in another). Due to impacts from the pandemic, academic achievement scores are also difficult to use effectively to determine differences between schools, as there are so many variables at play. While student, staff, and family/caregiver satisfaction can be examined through the use of a school climate survey, not all schools/SU/SDs use the same survey, so it is difficult to compare scores across schools. Our most helpful information about outcomes is generated through the use of our Annual Acknowledgements process. Self-reported SEB and academic outcomes are collected from schools who choose to complete the application and results will be reported on in the Annual Report.

### Centering Equity

As we know, PBIS is not fully implemented with fidelity until it is culturally responsive. VTPBIS schools continue to focus on centering equity across all features and tiers of PBIS implementation with the help of the [PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide](#).

The School-Wide Information System (SWIS) now has a reporting option that allows schools to look at disaggregated data and creates interpretive sentences

for each graph to tell schools their data story. They can disaggregate by students' IEP status, gender, English Language Learner status, and race/ethnicity to uncover any areas of disproportionality. Schools are increasingly accessing these reports, as shown in the graph below. In the 2019-2020 school year only 13% of Vermont schools using SWIS accessed equity reports, compared to 49% in 2021-2022.



## Summary and Recommendations

As we approach the third anniversary of the statewide shutdown (March 18, 2020), we continue to focus on SEB learning and wellbeing as the highest priority. In this time of limited staff capacity in schools, the BEST Team continues to promote doing a few things well that will significantly impact student outcomes. The following chart details the current status of the SY 23 VTPBIS Action Steps for Sustainability identified in the [2022 VTPBIS Annual Report](#):

SY 23 Goals	Status & Action Steps
1. Center equity within PBIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The VTPBIS State Team ensures that equity is centered in both professional learning <i>for</i> the Team and <i>by</i> the Team for educators.</li> <li>● The Annual VTPBIS Forum featured sessions on building collective ownership from staff and students in PBIS implementation.</li> <li>● The VTPBIS State Team encourages use of the <a href="#">Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide</a>.</li> <li>● The State Team began analyzing statewide student outcome data based on race/ethnicity to examine disproportionality in school discipline.</li> </ul>
2. Ensure access to relevant and accessible resources and trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sixteen <a href="#">trainings</a> were offered, reaching 511 participants. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Based on current needs of schools, additional Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) trainings have been offered, in addition to Utilizing De-escalation Strategies for Paraeducators; Understanding and Identifying Social/Emotional/Behavioral Data Webinar; and Utilizing De-escalation Strategies to Maintain Least Restrictive Environments.</li> <li>○ SEL and wellness opportunities included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Holly Rouelle’s VTPBIS Annual Forum keynote (see above)</li> <li>■ VTPBIS Annual Forum Workshops: SoulCollage®: Creative Collage to Promote Well-Being; Authentically Building Social/Emotional Skills and Community Through Nature-Based Learning; Using Play to Build a Community of Care; Caring Without “Crashing”: Practices to Prevent Burnout</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BEST Project staff attend CDCI-hosted professional development on accessible resources and trainings.</li><li>● Some trainings and meetings had to be moved virtual due to COVID concerns.</li><li>● Utilization of coaches has increased.</li></ul>
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