Managing Behavioral Disruptions in Early Grades

Reversing the Rising Frequency and Intensity of Student Misbehavior

District Leadership Forum
EAB: Making Education Smarter

Who We Are

- 2007
  Year founded
- 1,400+
  Institutions served
- 1,200+
  Dedicated EAB Staff

How We Serve

Identify **proven best practices** for the **most critical challenges** facing education leaders

Provide customized, **on-demand research** to help members meet their immediate needs

Help leaders **engage key stakeholders and accelerate progress** on key initiatives

Introducing the District Leadership Forum

- 2017
  Year founded
- 101
  Member districts
- 29
  States represented
Talking ‘bout My Generation

Generations Commonly Shaped by Defining Moments

Examples of Historical Events that Defined the Formative Years of Generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silent Generation</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Gen Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ages 73-93)</td>
<td>(ages 39-53)</td>
<td>(ages 6-23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Depression; World War II</td>
<td>The Challenger Disaster; Collapse of the Berlin Wall</td>
<td>The Great Recession</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
<th>Gen Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ages 54-72)</td>
<td>(ages 24-38)</td>
<td>(age 5 and younger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.; Vietnam War</td>
<td>The Attacks on 9/11</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beloit Mindset List

- Was first created by Tom McBride, former director of public affairs at Beloit College, in 1998
- Has become an annual tradition, enumerating many of the distinguishing characteristics of that year’s incoming freshman class
- Is circulated internationally among educators as a reminder of the cultural traits and realities of the generation they are now teaching

Students Surrounded by Distractions and Distress

- Rise in Mental Health Diagnoses
- Effects of the Great Recession
- Increased Substance Abuse
- Decreased Funding for Education
- Changes in Family Structure
- Increased Academic Pressure and Testing
- Decline in Free Play and Physical Activity
- Excessive Screen Time

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Disruptive Behavior High on the Priority List

Rising Number of Disruptions Reported by Administrators and Teachers

District Leaders May Underestimate Real Size of the Problem

% of Student Population Exhibiting Severe Behavioral Disruptions, By Educator Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educator Type</th>
<th>District Administrators</th>
<th>School Administrators</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=83</td>
<td>n=183</td>
<td>n=1,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Perceptions Reveal a Disturbing Trend in Disruptive Behavior

% of Teachers Responses Indicating Trends in Behavioral Disruptions over the Last Three Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n=876</th>
<th>Significantly fewer now</th>
<th>Fewer now</th>
<th>No change</th>
<th>More now</th>
<th>Significantly more now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I have an affluent part of my district and a part with lower socioeconomic status and there's not much difference between what schools report with regard to kids in crisis.”

Superintendent, MO

Source: DLF Managing Disruptive Behaviors Survey, 2018; EAB interviews and analysis.
### Disruptive Behavior Occurs Often, Takes Many Forms

% of Teachers Reporting the Following Disruptions Occur Frequently (Several Times per Week) or Very Frequently (Several Times per Day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disruption</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence towards a teacher or other school personnel</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse or threats towards a teacher or other school personnel</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence towards another student</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloping or fleeing the classroom unexpectedly</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse or threats towards a student</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disconnect/unresponsiveness</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantrums/oppositional defiance</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Gates Foundation, Teacher-Reported, 2012; DLF Survey, Teacher-Reported, 2018*

### Behavioral Disruptions Take a Significant Toll on Instructional Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Time per Week Teachers Spend on Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gates Foundation, Teacher-Reported, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=10,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 hr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Instructional Time per Week Lost to Behavioral Disruptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DLF Survey, Teacher-Reported, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:24 hr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools Expand Student Support Services

Variety of School Resources Available to Address Disruptive Students

% of District Responses Indicating How Support Staffing Has Changed in Response to Rising Behavioral Disruptions Over the Last Three Years, by Support Staff Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counselors</strong> (n=28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased significantly</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased slightly</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remained the same</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased slightly</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychologists</strong> (n=28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased significantly</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased slightly</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remained the same</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental Health Support Specialists</strong> (n=25)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased significantly</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased slightly</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral Aides/Specialists</strong> (n=27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased significantly</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased significantly</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Growing Educational Mandate

“...The introduction of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act placed much of the responsibility for student mental health on the education system, at least for students whose mental health could be linked to educational success.”

*Mental Health Interventions in Schools in High-Income Countries*, Lancet Psychiatry, 2015
Increased Staffing Unlikely to Meet Rising Demand

Building Student Relationships with All Staff Necessary to Address Problem

Despite Increases, Support Staff Ratios Still Far from Ideal

**Districts’ Perception of Current Support Staff Capacity to Meet Student Needs (DLF Survey Data)**

- **1:250**
  - Recommended ASCA\(^1\) ratio
- **1:482**
  - Average national ratio

**Behavior, Discipline, and Mental Health Require Effort from All Educators**

**It Takes a Village**

“Though increased funding for school counselors will help the issue, most mental health issues are not identified in random contact with school counselors. **This often requires relationship building, something that is more likely to be accomplished by teachers, mentors, or peer support efforts.**”

*School Counseling Resources Stretched Thin at Most Schools, Education Dive, 2018*

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1) American School Counselor Association.

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Punishment is a Common Response to Misbehavior

Various Exclusionary Practices Still the Norm Across Schools

Punitive Discipline Takes Many Forms

Out-of-school suspensions

In-school suspensions

Taking away recess, rewards, etc.

Calling parents into school to pick up child

Low Average National Rate (2.6%) Masks Significant Disparities By Race, Gender, and State

Highest suspension rate in the US (5.1%)

Largest suspension rate gap between black (14.3%) and white (1.8%) students

Rates for boys (3.8%) higher than for girls (1.1%)

% of Elementary Teachers Who Say They Withhold Recess and Rewards as a Form of Punishment

DLF Survey Data

n=958

Never 7.7
Very rarely 12
Rarely 13.6
Sometimes 38
Frequently 20.9
Very frequently 7.7


1) All figures below are for elementary schools.
Does Punishment Work?

Exclusionary Discipline Harmful to Both Disruptive and Well-Behaved Students

Variety of Punitive Practices are Ineffective at Improving Disruptive Student Behavior

"Exclusion from recess for bad behavior in a classroom deprives students of physical activity that can contribute toward improved behavior in the classroom."

Center for Disease Control, 2014

"In-school suspension was associated with lower grade point averages and increased likelihood of high school dropout. These findings raise caution about the use of in-school suspension [...] as an alternative to out-of-school suspension."

Blaire, C. et.al., Predictors and academic outcomes associated with in-school suspension, 2018

Removing the “Bad Apples” Does Not Help Others Learn

Study In Brief:
Suspending Progress: Collateral Consequences of Exclusionary Punishment in Public Schools (2014)

- Follows ~17,000 students in 17 middle and high schools across 3 years
- Finds that “high levels of out-of-school suspension [...] are associated with declining academic achievement among non-suspended students, even after adjusting for a school’s overall level of violence and disorganization.”

The Continuing Need to Rethink Discipline (The White House, 2016)

"Suspensions, expulsions and other exclusionary discipline policies and practices can be detrimental for not only school climate, but can also negatively impact student learning and success as well as social and emotional development."

Exclusionary Discipline Increasingly Out of Favor

Multiple States Consider Legislation to Limit Suspensions and Expulsions

States Considering Legislation Limiting Punitive Action in Schools

Examples of Enacted State Legislation

NJ: Requires districts to implement an early detection and prevention program to identify and support students with disciplinary problems (PK-2)

MD: Companions bills prohibit expulsions and suspensions in PK-2 (allow for federal law exceptions)

AR: Prohibits out-of-school suspension or expulsion K-5, with some exceptions

School Leaders Offered a Large Menu of Options...

PBIS
- Trauma-Informed Care
- SEL Curriculum
- Restorative Justice
- RTI/MTSS Framework
- Student Support Teams
- Alternative Placement
- Climate Surveys

... But Various Roadblocks Make It Hard to Achieve Tangible Results

- **Inconsistent Implementation**: Districts let schools choose what and how to implement, leading to dramatic variation from school to school.
- **Lack of Fidelity**: Staff skepticism of the “latest initiative” leads to unwillingness to adopt practices and ultimately erodes implementation.
- **No Accountability**: Initiatives started without clear district mandate, ownership, or measure of success, making them hard to sustain.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
A Tale of Missed Opportunities

Schools’ Reactive Approaches to Disruptions Fail to Address Student Needs on Time

Mapping the Journey of a Disruptive Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Behavior</th>
<th>School Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student internalizes personal or school issues, does not trust adults at school enough to share and get help</td>
<td>School has no way of identifying the student as at-risk because they have not acted out yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Student repeatedly acts out with increasing intensity, behavior is the only outlet of built up frustration</td>
<td>Teacher cannot manage escalating behavior, refers student to principal’s office for punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student punished for misbehavior, misses school, lags behind peers, and grows increasingly defiant</td>
<td>School engages support resources to address behavior and build coping skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Group intervention not effective in the short run, student continues to act out</td>
<td>Multiple tier 2/3 interventions attempted, student placed in alternative education setting as last resort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missed Opportunities at Every Step

- Schools should invest in preventive measures to identify at-risk student early, rather than wait for the student to act out.
- Schools should better prepare teachers to manage disruptive behavior and work to change punitive discipline policies.
- Skill-building and behavior support resources should be employed early, not only as a response to student behavior.
- Alternative placement should be used as a temporary setting to allow student to build skills before being used as a last-resort measure.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Managing Behavioral Disruptions in Early Grades

Reversing the Rising Frequency and Intensity of Student Misbehavior

1. Prevent Misbehavior Through Early Intervention
   1. Transition Program for Incoming High-Risk Kindergarteners
   2. Universal Behavioral Screening to Identify Students in Need of Support
   3. Teacher Home Visit Program
   4. Trusted Adult-Student Relationship Mapping

2. Create Conditions for Positive Classroom Behavior
   5. Self Regulation-Friendly Classroom Audit
   6. Expanded Time for Free Play
   7. Districtwide PBIS Implementation
   8. Standardized Behavior Guidelines and Data Collection

3. Promote the Social Emotional Well-Being of Students and Teachers
   9. Direct Instruction of Key Social-Emotional Skills
   10. Embedded SEL Routines for Adults
   11. Teacher Burnout Coping Supports

4. Enhance Support for Higher-Needs Students
   12. Trauma-Informed Perspective of Student Behavior
   13. Cross-Functional Behavior Health Intervention Team
   14. Cognitive Behavioral Support for Students with a History of Trauma
   15. Reintegration-Focused Alternative Classroom

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Despite Evidence of Effectiveness, Universal Screening Still Not the Norm

**Why Screen Students for Behavioral and Emotional Issues?**

**Tested and Validated**
- **High average (0.5-0.8)** positive predictive values\(^1\) of most universal screeners
- **Very high average (0.92-0.98)** negative predictive values\(^2\) of most universal screeners

**Endorsed by Multiple Entities**
- PBIS
- Surgeon General
- SAMHSA\(^3\)
- NASP
- The White House
- American Psychological Association

**“The key step in reform is to move school-based psychological services from the back of the service delivery system, in which only students at the highest level of risk receive services, to the front of service delivery through the use of universal, proactive screening.”**

NASP Position Statement: Mental and Behavioral Health Services, 2015

**Adoption of Recommended Practice Slow Across the Country**

**Nationwide Sample, 2014**
- \( n=454 \)
- **12.6%**

**DLF Member Survey, 2018**
- \( n=30 \)
- **30%**

Concerns Reveal Limited Understanding of What Screening Should Be Used For

Common Concerns about Universal Screening...

“We Will End Up Labeling Students if We Screen Them”

- Practice already common in other areas (reading, math)
- Screening identifies need for support, not potential threats
- Aversion reinforces stigma associated with behavioral and mental health

“Screening Will Identify Too Many Students and Stretch Our Support Resources”

- Number of students identified through screening similar to numbers from teacher referrals
- Proactive approach more cost-effective in the long run

“We Don’t Need Universal Screening, Teachers Already Refer Students”

- Standardized screening procedure reduces teacher bias
- Teacher referrals usually come after a disruption has occurred

...Are Driven by Faulty Assumptions

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Establishing a Reliable Procedure Critical to Success

Proliferation of Tools Makes Universal Screening Accessible to Any District

Basic Considerations for Adopting Universal Screening

Choose an evidence-based tool in consultation with mental health staff

Characteristics to Consider:

• Cost
• Time to administer
• Complexity
• What it measures

Secure parental consent via opt-in/out

Train teachers on properly using selected tool

Screen several times a year for continuous identification

Multiple Reliable Instruments Available

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIMAS</td>
<td>Progress monitoring; identifies positive skills; electronic scoring</td>
<td>Only available in English; no student self-report option until age 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASC-3</td>
<td>Very high validity and reliability; excellent online tools; multiple raters</td>
<td>Fairly complex to administer; expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAEBRS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDQ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SSBD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRSS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSIS-PSG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secure parental consent via opt-in/out

Train teachers on properly using selected tool

Screen several times a year for continuous identification

Practice #2: Universal Behavioral Screening to Identify Students in Need of Support

Comprehensive Supports Address Student Behavior

Boston’s CBHM\(^1\) Aims to Provide Relevant Support to Every Student

**Comprehensive Behavioral Health Model Overview**

**Profiled Institution:**
Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA

**Key Model “Non-Negotiables” for Participating Schools**

- Strong leadership and accountability at district level, including data monitoring and resource support
- Universal screening to provide schools with actionable data and a way to track progress
- PBIS\(^1\) implementation in all CBHM schools
- Implementation of social-emotional learning curriculum as a universal support that instructs all students on critical social skills
- School psychologists at each building designated as point people to support CBHM implementation

Source: Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA; EAB interviews and analysis.

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1) Comprehensive Behavioral Health Model.
2) Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports.
Practice #2: Universal Behavioral Screening to Identify Students in Need of Support

Screening Process More than Just an Assessment

Profiled Institution:
Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA

Timeline of Universal Screening at Boston Public Schools

1. Train staff on using BIMAS
2. Secure parental consent
3. Conduct 1st screening at least 6 weeks into the school year
4. Share results with all levels (district, school, grade)
5. Gather school- and grade-level teams to discuss data and target interventions
6. Track progress and adapt interventions every 6 weeks
7. Conduct 2nd screening in spring
8. Repeat steps 4-6

Lessons from Successful Implementation

Track Multiple Levels of Data
Evaluate individual, class, grade, school, and district data to better target interventions

Keep Teachers Informed and Supported During Process
Dedicate time to conduct screening and have administrators help teachers during process

Set Screening as Basis for Targeted Support
Use assessment to raise awareness, inform practices, and provide early interventions

Source: Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA; EAB interviews and analysis.
Practice #2: Universal Behavioral Screening to Identify Students in Need of Support

Assessment Enables Targeted Action Planning

“Grow the Green” Initiative Aims to Address Broad “Tier 1” Student Supports

Screening Data Helps Whole-School Team Develop Universal Interventions

Principal, assistants, teachers, MH\(^1\) professionals, counselors meet to discuss schoolwide data

Team selects appropriate tier 1 interventions to address specific population needs

Example

Screening identifies high number of students at risk for internalizing issues. Tier 1 team conducts classroom observations to help teachers implement SEL\(^1\) lessons focused on coping skills, conflict resolution, and communication.

Team also works with lunch/recess monitors to reinforce positive social skills during unstructured activities.

Team develops 6-week plan to implement, adapt, and measure effects of chosen intervention

Whole-School planning tool available in the Appendix

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1) Mental Health.
2) Social-Emotional Learning.

Source: Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA; EAB interviews and analysis.
Practice #2: Universal Behavioral Screening to Identify Students in Need of Support

Assessment Enables Targeted Action Planning (cont.)

Further Interventions Designed to Address Individual Classroom Concerns

Grade-Level Team Addresses Classroom and Individual Needs

Teachers, counselors, and paraprofessionals discuss grade-level, classroom, and individual data.

Team chooses necessary interventions across all 3 tiers to address the needs of students and equip teachers with the right tools to support them.

Example

*If screening identifies over 20% of students in a classroom as at-risk on any of the 5 BIMAS categories, student support teams automatically choose appropriate group interventions for the students, taking into account their academic needs as well.*

Team develops **6-week plan** to implement, adapt, and measure effects of chosen intervention.

Grade-Level planning tool available in the Appendix.

---

1) Mental Health.

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Source: Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA; EAB interviews and analysis.
**Universal Screening Facilitates Integration of Support Services**

**Data-Driven Approach Improves Variety of Outcomes**

“Whether you use a screener or not, students who need support but may not be getting it still exist in our schools. **So using a screener is one way to make sure more of those students get the supports they need.**”

*Jill Snyder Battal, School Psychologist, Boston Public Schools*

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1) Average score of all students identified in “some risk” or “high risk” categories. BIMAS defines scores of ≥70 as “High risk,” 60-69 as “Some risk,” and <60 as “Low risk.” Mean score = 50.

2) Average score of all students identified in “some risk” or “high risk” categories. BIMAS defines scores of ≤40 as “Concern,” 41-59 as “Typical,” and ≥ 60 as “Strength.”

Source: Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA; EAB interviews and analysis.
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Improving School Environment Begins in the Classroom

Disruptive Behavior Harms Both Students and Teachers, Impedes Learning

Disruptive Classrooms Take a Heavy Toll on Teachers

44% Of US teachers who left the profession cited disruptive student behavior as a reason for leaving (2005)

53% Of US teachers who moved schools cited disruptive student behavior as a reason for moving (2005)

Positive Environment Can Be Created In Multiple Different Ways

“A positive school environment is defined as a school having appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy.”

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

Practice 5:
Self Regulation-Friendly Classroom Audit

Practice 6:
Expanded Time for Free Play

Practice 7:
Districtwide PBIS Implementation

Practice 8:
Standardized Behavior Guidelines and Data Collection

Physical Space Affects Learning and Attention

Study in Brief: Visual Environment, Attention Allocation, and Learning in Young Children

- Randomized controlled trial of 24 kindergarteners placed in six different classrooms
- Children were taught six introductory science lessons on material they previously had not been taught
- Found that children in highly decorated classrooms were more distracted, spent more time off-task, and learned less than if they were in classrooms with no decorations

% of Time Spent Off-Task

- Non-decorated Classroom: 28.4%
- Decorated Classroom: 38.6%

% of Accurate Responses on Test Questions

- Decorated classroom: 42
- Non-decorated classroom: 55

Practice #5: Self Regulation-Friendly Classroom Audit

Understanding the Theory to Change the Practice

Rondout SD 72 Transforms Physical Space from Triggering to Comforting

Educate Adults about Environmental Triggers

- Licensed OT\(^1\) teaches educators, parents on environmental effects on children’s brains
- Presentation focuses on how light, sound, temperature affect behavior
- Teacher study groups and ongoing PD\(^1\) sessions discussing neuroscience research help teachers understand how principles can be applied in practice

Modify the Physical Space to Support Student Growth

- Teachers reorganize their classrooms in order to:
  - Decrease clutter and reduce colors
  - Vary types of space (e.g., individual, collaborative)
  - Provide more natural or incandescent light
  - Create alerting and calming areas
  - Allow standing desks and moving chairs

Teach Students to Use Spaces Effectively

- Teachers educate students on using the newly-designed space
  **Examples include:**
  - Using calming corners
  - Calming themselves down via blankets or beanbag chairs
  - Alerting themselves via obstacle courses and other physical activities in the classroom

Profiled Institution:
Rondout School District 72, Illinois

Source: Rondout School District 72, Illinois; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Occupational Therapist.
2) Professional development.

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Practice #5: Self Regulation-Friendly Classroom Audit

Enabling Teachers to Quickly Modify Classroom

Checklist Allows Educators to Address Student Needs

2-page checklist allows teachers to systematically scan the classroom for important potential stressors

Grouping helps teacher think in categories: visual clutter, lighting, noise, hydration and nutrition, seating options, smells

Full Classroom Environment Checklist available in the Appendix

Classroom Environment Checklist

When designing a classroom environment, you must take into account stressors that may be present that can impact a child’s learning and behaviour. Using the checklist below, identify what you have in place and what you can strive towards to make your classroom as Self-Reg friendly as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Classroom as the “Third Teacher” Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Clutter</strong></td>
<td>□ All surfaces (e.g., desks, shelves) in the classroom are free of excess clutter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Walls and bulletin boards are organized with information grouped simply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Desk sized copies of tools usually displayed on walls (e.g., number or letter keys) are available to students, and neatly put away when not being used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Desk top study carrels to reduce visual input when working at a desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ The floor is clear and clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lighting</strong></td>
<td>□ Lighting is adjusted throughout the day according to the arousal needs of the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Natural lighting is maximized where available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Fluorescent lighting is minimized where possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Differently lit areas are available for students to access, based on their preferences (a bright area, and a dimmer lit area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Curtains to create a darker area and use of lamps for ambiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noise</strong></td>
<td>□ Excess noise is reduced where possible (e.g., weather stripping on doors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Reverberation is reduced (e.g., carpets, egg cartons on walls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Noise canceling headphones or earbuds are available or allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Electrical humming from lights, heating/cooling vents, electronics, etc. is minimized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A non-startling noise used to indicate class change overs or breaks (e.g., a rain stick)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hydration &amp; Nutrition</strong></td>
<td>□ Access to water at desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Regular hydration breaks available throughout the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Healthy meals served from the cafeteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Encourage healthy snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Spare water and healthy snacks in classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provides specific guidance on how to adjust the classroom

Profiled Institution:
The MEHRIT Centre, Canada

Practice #5: Self Regulation-Friendly Classroom Audit

Easy to Spot the Change in Environment

Educating Teachers Leads to Improved Classroom Experience for Students

Typical Elementary School Classroom

Classroom Conducive to Better Self Regulation

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
# Managing Behavioral Disruptions in Early Grades

## Reversing the Rising Frequency and Intensity of Student Misbehavior

### 1. Prevent Misbehavior Through Early Intervention

1. Transition Program for Incoming High-Risk Kindergarteners
2. Universal Behavioral Screening to Identify Students in Need of Support
3. Teacher Home Visit Program
4. Trusted Adult-Student Relationship Mapping

### 2. Create Conditions for Positive Classroom Behavior

5. Self Regulation-Friendly Classroom Audit
6. Expanded Time for Free Play
7. Districtwide PBIS Implementation
8. Standardized Behavior Guidelines and Data Collection

### 3. Promote the Social Emotional Well-Being of Students and Teachers

9. Direct Instruction of Key Social-Emotional Skills
10. Embedded SEL Routines for Adults
11. Teacher Burnout Coping Supports

### 4. Enhance Support for Higher-Needs Students

12. Trauma-Informed Perspective of Student Behavior
13. Cross-Functional Behavior Health Intervention Team
14. Cognitive Behavioral Support for Students with a History of Trauma
15. Reintegration-Focused Alternative Classroom

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Concerns Over Teacher Well-Being

But Support Systems Not Keeping Pace with Mental, Emotional Strain

Teachers Report High Levels of Stress and Emotional Strain

58%
Of teachers described their mental health\(^1\) as “not good” for at least 7 of the last 30 days

61%
Of teachers say their work is “always” or “often” stressful

78%
Of teachers say they feel mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the work day

Strategies to Support Teacher Wellness Often Insufficient or Overlooked

Teacher “Self-Care” Strategies

- Common challenges:
  - Superficial
  - Haphazard adoption
  - Inconsistent follow through

Ongoing Social-Emotional Support

- Aspirational for many districts
- Lack of systematic, measured efforts

Employee Assistance Programs\(^2\)

- Common challenges:
  - Expensive
  - Underutilized
  - Stigmatized

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1) Including stress, depression, or emotional challenges.
2) Voluntary, work-based programs that offer free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems.

## Trauma a Significant Driver of Student Misbehavior

With a Troubling Impact on Students’ Behavioral and Social Functioning

### Early Traumatic Experiences Prevalent Across the Country

- **>46%**
  - Of children nationwide have had at least one ACE

- **>20%**
  - Of children nationwide have had at least two ACEs

### District Leaders See Many Sources of Trauma in Their Own Communities

- **Family instability**
  - (e.g., abuse, neglect, parental drug use)
- **Sudden incidents**
  - (e.g., accident, death)
- **Natural disasters**
- **Refugee populations**

### Children Who Face Adverse Events More Likely to Struggle in School

- **2x**
  - Children ages 6+ with two or more ACEs are twice as likely to be disengaged from school

- **4x**
  - Children ages 3 to 5 with two or more ACEs are four times more likely to:
    - Have trouble calming themselves down
    - Be easily distracted
    - Struggle to make and keep friends

Understanding the Impact of Adversity

Research Shows Toxic Stress Can Hinder Children’s Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development

Children exposed to chronic poverty-related stressors experience reduced gray matter volumes in the frontal and temporal cortex and the hippocampus.

3–4% Below developmental norms for families at 150% of poverty line

8–9% Below developmental norms for families at 100% of poverty line

"Adjusting for potential confounders [...] experiencing ACEs is associated with below-average language and literacy skills, math skills, attention problems, social problems, and aggression. [...] With few exceptions, increased ACEs were associated with increased odds of below-average academic skills and behavior problems."

Jimenez et. al., “Adverse Experiences in Early Childhood,” 2016

1) Parts of the brain responsible for planning complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making, moderating social behavior, emotional association, among other functions.

Lack of Understanding Exacerbates Student Issues

Knowledge Important First Step in Changing Teacher Mindset and Approach

**Study in Brief:** “Impact of Trauma-Informed Care Professional Development on [...] Knowledge, Dispositions, and Behaviors Toward Traumatized Students”

- **Large, urban** school district
- **552 participants**, classified and certified staff
- **3.5 hour** trauma-informed care (TIC) professional development
- **Pre-post test**, 52 item Trauma-Informed Care Dispositions Survey

Found that TIC professional development resulted in a **statistically significant change in:**
- Overall knowledge of TIC
- Self-ratings on 21 of 26 disposition subscales
- Self-ratings on 9 of 10 behavior subscales

**Sample Disposition Measures**
- “I feel empathy for students when they are having problems”
- “I try to look at student’s side of a disagreement before making a decision”
- “I give students opportunities to make choices and decisions”
- “I believe it is important to learn about students and their community”

**Sample Behavior Measures**
- “I utilize strategies with the intent to create a safe environment for students”
- “I use active listening strategies when interacting with students”
- “I give students positive reinforcement for good behavior”

Sources: Goodwin-Glick, K., “Impact of Trauma Informed Care Professional Development on School Personnel Perceptions and Knowledge Dispositions, and Behaviors Toward Traumatized Students,” Bowling Green State University Graduate School of Education, May 2017; Parker, C., “Teacher Empathy Reduces Student Suspensions,” Stanford University, April 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.
Growing Number of Frameworks Exist to Create Trauma-Informed Schools

Popular Trauma-Informed Care Frameworks Share Four Main Components

- The Flexible Framework, Helping Traumatized Children Learn (Massachusetts Advocates for Children)
- Compassionate Schools Initiative (Washington State OSPI
- The Sanctuary Model (By Dr. Sandra L. Bloom)
- Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative (Missouri DESE)

Schoolwide focus to address broad impact of toxic stress rather than providing treatment only to those experiencing acute trauma symptoms

Dedication to a safe school environment (e.g., physical safety, psychological safety, orderly and welcoming learning environment)

Building student skills (e.g., resilience, coping, relationship building)

Building staff capacity to support students experiencing toxic stress, trauma (e.g., instructional strategies, effective discipline, strategies to prevent burnout)

Despite Interest, Districts Take Fragmented Approach to Trauma-Informed Care

Efforts exclusively at school, individual level (e.g., book reads, conferences)

District-developed training available, but optional for interested staff

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