ALIGNING BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT WITH A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

BUILDING A CONTINUUM OF PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE
NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER

CENTER ON PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports

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The U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) was created in 1998 to provide guidance on threat assessment both within the U.S. Secret Service and to others with criminal justice and public safety responsibilities. Through the Presidential Threat Protection Act of 2000, Congress formally authorized NTAC to conduct research on threat assessment and other types of targeted violence; provide training on threat assessment and targeted violence; facilitate information-sharing among agencies with protective and/or public safety responsibilities; provide case consultation on individual threat assessment investigations and for agencies building threat assessment units; and develop programs to promote the standardization of federal, state, and local threat assessment processes and investigations.

Contributions to this document from the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) were made possible through funds provided by the Center on PBIS cooperative grant supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education (H326S230002). Mohamed Soliman, MA, EdS served as the project officer. The views expressed by the Center on PBIS do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, or enterprise mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 4

What is Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management? 8

Best Practices for Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management 14

What is the PBIS Framework? 21

Considerations for BTAM and MTSS/PBIS Working in Conjunction 26

Considerations for Supporting Students With Disabilities Throughout the BTAM Process 41

Conclusion 47

Guiding Questions for Getting Started 48

References 50

Embedded Hyperlinks 53

INTRODUCTION

While K-12 schools are safe places and have become even safer in recent years (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017), incidents of targeted violence continue to attract widespread attention and concern across communities. In this context, districts and states have increasingly turned to the use of behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) to assess concerning or threatening behaviors and provide appropriate interventions and supports to reduce the risk of harm. Across the United States, 38 states require using BTAM by law or encourage it by policy (National Association of State Boards of Education, n.d.). Current data indicate that 85% of public schools in the United States report having a behavioral threat assessment team in place (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) whether or not their state requires it.

The U.S. Secret Service pioneered BTAM in the early 1990s to protect prominent public officials and persons. Since then, it has been adapted to prevent acts of targeted violence that impact other areas of the community, such as schools

and workplaces. Following the tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999, the Secret Service developed the field of BTAM in schools through a partnership with the Department of Education to examine targeted violence in K-12 schools and create protocols to help prevent future tragedies (Vossekuil et al., 2002). Over the years, research has demonstrated positive school safety outcomes when BTAM is implemented with fidelity (Cornell et al., 2012; Nekvasil & Cornell, 2015).

BTAM is a proactive approach to identifying students whose behavior elicits concern for their safety or the safety of others, assessing the concerning behavior in context, and providing appropriate interventions and resources to manage the risk of harm while also supporting the student (National Threat Assessment Center, 2022). Successful implementation requires coordinated effort among various stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, counselors, psychologists, families, and community partners, along with expertise in assessment and interventions that are both student-centered and evidence-based and which promote connection and belonging while minimizing student time away from learning.

In an attempt to follow prescribed models and/or state mandates, schools and districts occasionally establish school safety and other prevention efforts (e.g., school climate, BTAM) separate from broader prevention systems, other existing student support programs, and, in some communities, separate from the district itself. Siloed implementation like this can strain limited resources and may result in less effective and less efficient supports for students. Common barriers to integration include lack of cross-team coordination, limited professional development, and challenges in aligning different data systems and intervention approaches. In instances of siloed implementation, school safety and prevention efforts may not be adequately monitored for effectiveness, fidelity, or impartiality in either referrals or outcomes.

Consistent implementation and **balanced outcomes across all student groups** are of paramount importance for behavioral threat assessment.

While most research has not identified disparities across student groups in how threats were classified or disciplined (e.g., Cornell et al., 2018; Crepeau-Hobson & Leech, 2022), research on disparities for students with disabilities is more mixed (e.g., Cornell et al., 2018; Crepeau-Hobson & Leech, 2022; Maeng et al., 2020, 2023). Consistent implementation and balanced outcomes across all student groups are of paramount importance for behavioral threat assessment. Achieving these efforts is more challenging in siloed systems.

BTAM is intended to support student needs before they escalate into acts of school violence or crisis requiring intervention by law enforcement or medical personnel. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) can provide a framework for a BTAM team to extend options for prevention and intervention by working in conjunction with a broader system designed to provide access to proactive and early intervention for students needing support. The PBIS framework can help enhance efficiencies, address inequalities, and improve the effectiveness of behavior support and violence prevention efforts by using data to guide decision-making and systems to monitor and support implementation fidelity and effectiveness. Likewise, implementation of BTAM can support MTSS/PBIS implementation through enhanced processes and procedures for intensive interventions. While MTSS/PBIS or BTAM can each be effectively implemented alone, for schools that are implementing either MTSS/PBIS or BTAM, the integration of the two frameworks offers several possible advantages:

- Streamlined systems and processes
- More efficient resource utilization
- Enhanced communication and collaboration
- Improved data collection and analysis of implementation and effectiveness
- Better outcomes for students and staff
- More comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies

BTAM is intended to support student needs before they escalate into acts of school violence or crisis requiring intervention by law enforcement or medical personnel.

PURPOSE

Aligning BTAM and MTSS/PBIS implementation is mutually beneficial for the enhancement of school climate, student well-being, and safety. In order to support teams in achieving these valued outcomes, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) and the Center on PBIS have partnered to develop this joint document intended for school and district leaders as well as members of both BTAM and MTSS/PBIS teams. This document begins with a description of the critical features of BTAM and best practices for BTAM implementation, then describes the essential elements of PBIS. Recognizing that each school's journey will be unique, it then provides considerations for aligning and integrating BTAM and the MTSS/PBIS framework and supporting students with disabilities throughout the BTAM process.

WHAT IS BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT?

Behavioral threat assessment and management or "BTAM" (also known as behavioral threat assessment) is an evidence-based approach for preventing acts of targeted violence in schools. For over twenty years, NTAC's research on both school attacks[1] (2019) and averted attacks[2] (2021) has shown that there is no accurate or useful profile of the type of individual who will carry out or plan an attack. Rather, research shows that students display a variety of observable, concerning behaviors as they escalate toward violence.

In K-12 schools, behavioral threat assessment and management is a proactive, preventative, and supportive approach to:

- Identify students who display behavior that elicits significant concern for the safety of themselves or others;
- Assess the context of the concerning behaviors, along with information on the student's actions and circumstances (e.g., bullying experiences, stressors, mental health needs, negative homelife factors, substance misuse and abuse) to evaluate the student's risks and needs; and

- Manage any risk by providing appropriate, student-focused supports, resources, and interventions to reduce the risk of harm and promote student health and wellness (National Threat Assessment Center, 2022).

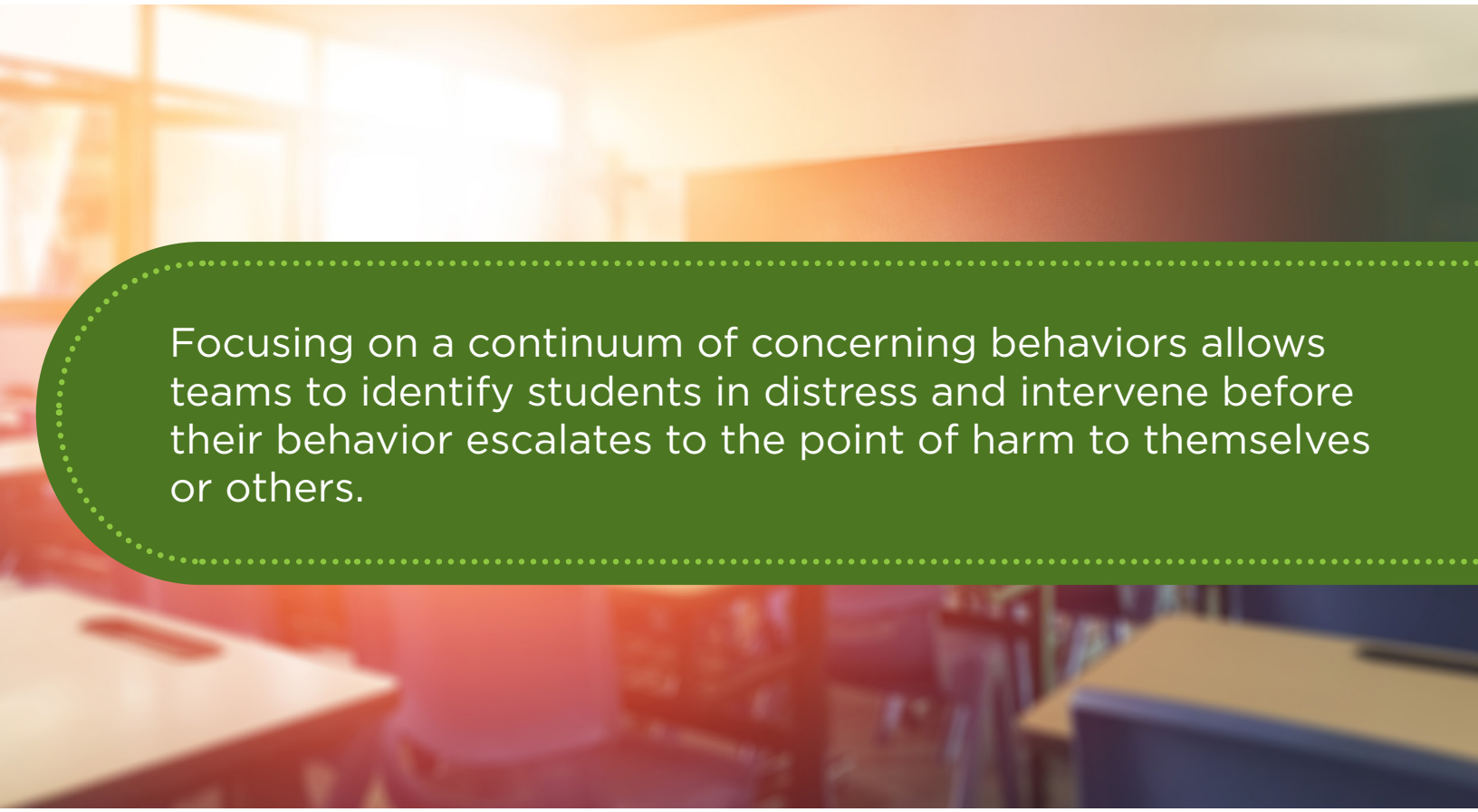
This nuanced approach to prevention focuses on early identification of students who pose a risk of harm to themselves or others and early intervention and support to reduce the risk and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. It also emphasizes a behavior-based approach to prevention, focusing on the behaviors a student displays that may communicate a need for greater care and concern.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Behavioral threat assessment and management is a systematic and proactive approach to preventing targeted violence in schools. It has several defining characteristics and implementation factors.

BTAM CHARACTERISTIC	BTAM IMPLEMENTATION FACTOR
Focuses on behaviors, not traits or profiles	Research has shown there is no accurate or useful profile of a student who will engage in targeted violence, but they often display concerning behaviors before perpetrating an attack (NTAC, 2019, 2021). Focusing on a continuum of concerning behaviors allows teams to identify students in distress and intervene before their behavior escalates to the point of harm to themselves or others.
Involves multidisciplinary school staff	Establishing a multidisciplinary team to respond to reports of concerning behavior is considered best practice. Local education agencies can structure the team to best meet the local needs and available resources (school-based teams, a district-based team, or both). The team will lead the process of gathering additional information and collaborate on designing an intervention and management plan. Teams should include diverse representation from various disciplines and functions within the school community including, but not limited to, administration; individuals with mental health expertise (e.g., school counselor, school psychologist); individuals with social, emotional, behavioral (SEB) expertise (e.g., school counselor, social worker); individuals with special education expertise; individuals focused on student health and wellness (e.g., school nurse); and school safety specialists (e.g., school resource officer).

BTAM CHARACTERISTIC	BTAM IMPLEMENTATION FACTOR
Identifies threatening and other concerning behaviors and assesses them in context	When student behaviors elicit concern for their safety or that of others, they should be assessed in context and not in isolation. The multidisciplinary team should gather information from multiple sources (e.g., the student of concern, teachers, classmates, family, and friends) to better inform a more accurate understanding of the student's thinking, behavior, and situational circumstances (e.g., stressors). Gathering information from diverse sources helps to ensure the team identifies concerning behaviors and accurately assesses the student's risk and needs to better provide appropriate interventions, supports, and resources. Additionally, multidisciplinary teams should evaluate the student's concerning behaviors in the context of their age and social-emotional development. Although some behaviors may seem inappropriate or maladaptive, they may be typical for adolescent behavior or in the context of identified mental health or developmental needs.

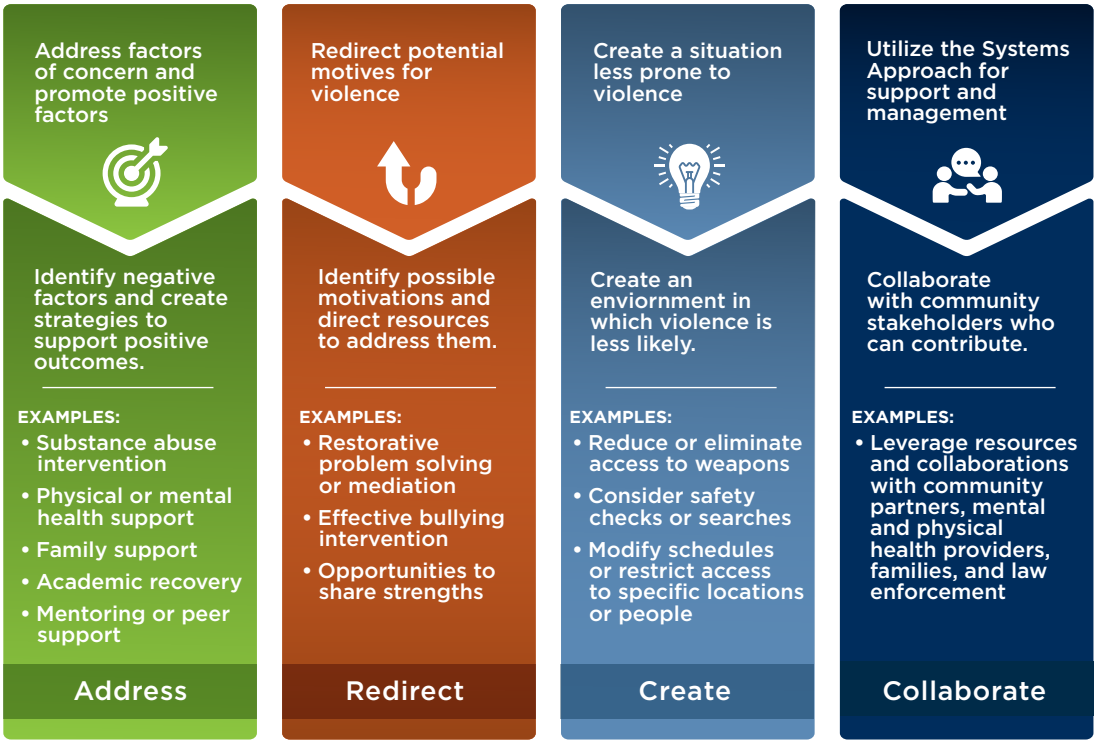


Focusing on a continuum of concerning behaviors allows teams to identify students in distress and intervene before their behavior escalates to the point of harm to themselves or others.

BTAM CHARACTERISTIC	BTAM IMPLEMENTATION FACTOR
Provides students with additional supports	A primary objective of the multidisciplinary team is to identify relevant interventions and resources which can be leveraged to support the student and manage any risk of harm. Any student assessed as posing a risk of harm by the multidisciplinary team should receive an individualized support and management plan that considers the student's specific social, emotional, and behavioral needs and considers the impact the student's school, home, and community life have on their thinking and behaviors. Depending on the information gathered and assessed, the student may need help or guidance coping with losses, developing resiliency to overcome setbacks, learning more appropriate strategies to manage emotions, or reducing the effect of stressors. Support and management plans could seek to stabilize the student's physical and emotional environment by addressing factors of concern and promoting positive factors, redirecting potential motives for harm to self or others while helping them toward more favorable outcomes, and creating a situation less prone to violence (see Figure 1). Resources could include peer support programs or counseling to enhance social skills and/or emotional competency, life skills classes, tutoring in specific subjects, or mental health support. Additional supports could address the impact of home life factors (e.g., adverse childhood experiences [ACEs]) experiences with bullying and/or harassment, or social services for housing and living stability. Throughout the process, the multidisciplinary team should consider coordination with outside resources or a student's special education team, as relevant.

FIGURE 1

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT OF CONCERNING BEHAVIOR DURING BTAM



BTAM CHARACTERISTIC	BTAM IMPLEMENTATION FACTOR
Utilizes existing school resources	As part of the support process, the multidisciplinary team should determine what existing, school-based resources can be leveraged across tiers (e.g., counselor-led groups, targeted interventions, functional behavioral assessment and planning, scheduling changes) to provide ongoing support. Additionally, the team should identify community-based resources and points of contact for any specific resources or supports unavailable at the school or district levels (e.g., intensive mental health support, social services). Through their expertise, team members may have community contacts that could aid the student's well-being and support them comprehensively. For students with disabilities (SWD), the multidisciplinary team must coordinate with their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team, as described on pages 41-46.
Promotes a safe school climate	Positive school climates built on a culture of safety, respect, trust, and social-emotional support enhance targeted violence prevention. Safe school environments are characterized by adults who prioritize student support, encourage communication between faculty and students, actively intervene in conflicts, and work to prevent harassment and bullying. In schools where teachers and staff are encouraged to build positive, trusting relationships with students, students feel connected, cared for, and empowered to share concerns without fear of discipline or shame.

Additionally, these defining characteristics and implementation factors of BTAM serve to address common misperceptions of its use.

BTAM

Is **NOT** a criminal investigation

- Often, students who come to the attention of the school have not engaged in criminal activity so interacting with them as if they have committed a crime does not foster a positive, trusting relationship with the student. Assessing students who display concerning behaviors should be focused on gathering information about them and their behaviors within the context of relevant factors such as age, social and emotional development, mental health and well-being, and personal interests in order to provide support.

Does **NOT** involve zero tolerance

- Zero-tolerance policies do not consider the context associated with a student's behavior and are not intended to address student needs. In contrast, behavioral threat assessment purposefully considers the context surrounding a student's behavior and uses that information to identify the most appropriate interventions and resources to support their needs.

Is **NOT** a disciplinary process

- The primary objective of a behavioral threat assessment is early identification and early intervention – in other words, proactive prevention. The process is not synonymous with reactive disciplinary processes, exclusionary practices, or punitive measures.

Does **NOT** replace existing student support programs

- A behavioral threat assessment approach complements existing, related student support programs (e.g., MTSS/PBIS). This combination of approaches promotes successful outcomes for all students and decreases the risk of harm to the school community (NTAC, 2021).

Is **NOT** a physical security measure

- Behavioral threat assessment focuses on understanding a student's concerning behavior in context and identifying effective support and management strategies. It is unrelated to the physical security of a building (e.g., door locks and screening systems).

While BTAM is separate from a disciplinary process, it is important to recognize that it may coincide with disciplinary, punitive, or legal actions depending upon the severity of the behavior and local policies.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Following the tragic school shootings in Parkland, FL and Santa Fe, TX in 2018, the Secret Service launched an initiative to provide updated research and guidance to school personnel and other public safety partners on the prevention of school-based violence. That year, the NTAC released *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model*[3] (2018), which provides actionable guidance for schools on creating a targeted violence prevention plan to decrease the risk of students engaging in harm to themselves or the school community. The eight recommended steps serve as a blueprint for implementation and can be tailored to the specific context and needs of the school, its students, and its community.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT TEAM

- Form a team representing a variety of disciplines within the school community including at least:

  - Teachers (general and special educators)
  - Administrators
  - Individuals with social, emotional, behavioral (SEB) expertise (e.g., counselor, social worker)
  - Individuals with mental health expertise (e.g., school psychologist, social worker)
  - School safety specialists (e.g., school resource officer, local law enforcement liaison)

- Local education agencies can structure the team to best meet the local needs and available resources through school-based teams, a central district-based team, or a combination of both.

- The team's job is to receive reports of concerning student behavior and situations; gather additional information to better assess the student's risks and needs; and identify interventions, supports, and resources to reduce the risk of harm to self or others and make positive outcomes for the student more likely.

- Teams meet whenever concerning behavior or situations are brought to their attention. They also meet regularly to discuss implementation, continue learning and refining best practices, and continue monitoring the progress of students who are being supported.

While some schools or districts refer to their team as a Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) Team, others have opted to use other names such as Assessment and Care Team (ACT) to emphasize the care-based nature of the work or Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) to highlight focusing on a spectrum of concerning behaviors.

STEP 2: DEFINE PROHIBITED AND CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

- Define a continuum of behaviors that initiate the behavioral threat assessment process, ranging from contextually concerning behaviors to those that are prohibited.

  - **Prohibited behaviors** warrant immediate intervention (e.g., threatening or engaging in violence, bringing a weapon to school, bullying, harassment, and similar behaviors that may pose a direct risk of violence).
  - **Concerning behaviors** may not necessarily be indicative of violence, but warrant additional information to determine if student-centered support and intervention

are appropriate (e.g., concerning statements and actions; unusual interest in violence or weapons; sudden or dramatic changes in behavior or appearance; withdrawal or isolation; substance abuse; depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideations).

- Teams are encouraged to establish a low threshold for intervention and support. This will position the team to more comprehensively address a continuum of behaviors and identify students in distress before their behavior escalates to the point of harm to themselves or those around them.

STEP 3: ESTABLISH AND PROVIDE TRAINING ON A CENTRAL REPORTING MECHANISM

- Students may display behaviors that prompt concern from those around them (e.g., classmates, friends, teachers, and family) in various ways, such as observable risky behavior; concerning or threatening statements made in person, online, or in text messages; or submitting assignments with bizarre or unusual content or statements. When behaviors prompt concern, those around the student need a method for reporting and sharing their concerns.

- Schools and districts should encourage bystanders (e.g., students, staff) to report prohibited and concerning behaviors that may indicate a safety risk or that a student is in need of resources or supports.

- By offering multiple reporting methods (e.g., email or online form, text or mobile application, phone number, trusted adult) BTAM teams can reduce or remove barriers to reporting and make it accessible and safe for the community.

For strategies and guidance on creating and enhancing a central reporting system, see *Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting: A Toolkit for Strengthening K-12 Reporting Programs*[4] (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency & U.S. Secret Service, 2023).

STEP 4: DETERMINE THE THRESHOLD FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERVENTION

- While a multidisciplinary BTAM team can likely handle most reported incidents and concerning behaviors with school-based or community resources, some situations may necessitate law enforcement intervention due to the severity of the concern.

- Reports involving weapons and/or imminent/immediate safety risks (e.g., presence of a weapon, threats of serious violence) should be immediately relayed to local law enforcement.

- Teams are encouraged to consider when they will request local law enforcement support to assist with assessing or gathering information and establish relevant guidelines for that process. Considerations may include safety concerns for students or family members, student health and wellness, existing district policies and resources, and actions beyond the legal scope of the district. Depending on the situation, local law enforcement may support the team's assessment of the concerning behavior by partnering with a social worker to conduct a welfare check at the student's home, speaking with a student's parent or guardian, checking for the presence of weapons and safe storage in the home, or other law enforcement actions which help the team better understand the context surrounding the student's concerning behaviors and the risk of harm the student may pose to themselves or others.

STEP 5: ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- The assessment process and procedures that a multidisciplinary threat assessment team implements should help form a more accurate understanding of the student's thinking, behavior, and circumstances in school, at home, and in the community. The goal is to evaluate the presence of factors that may indicate the possibility of harm to self or other members of the school community.

- Teams should establish protocols to gather information from a variety of sources (e.g., the student of concern, classmates, friends, family, disciplinary history, academic assignments, school records, and previous interventions) to ensure they are identifying any relevant concerning behaviors and accurately assessing the student's risk and needs. This will better position the team to provide more appropriate resources, supports, and interventions.

- To ensure accurate assessment, teams should evaluate a student's concerning behaviors in the context of their age, social and emotional development, and disability status.

- To more comprehensively assess concerning behavior, teams should organize their information gathering around themes such as bullying and harassment; mental health and substance abuse; concerning communications; stressors; recent downward progressions in behavior, mood, or social activity; home life factors (e.g., ACEs, present living situation); academic performance; school disciplinary history; inappropriate interest in concerning topics (e.g., past school attacks or mass attackers); weapons use and interest in violence; previous contact with law enforcement; social networks; recent losses or loss of status (e.g., shame, humiliation, loss of significant relationship); and motivation for behavior.

- Additionally, assessment considerations should include home, school, community, and virtual settings to understand the context in which the student is operating and illuminate behavior indicative of social, emotional, and/or psychological distress as a response to the environment.

STEP 6: DEVELOP RISK MANAGEMENT AND STUDENT SUPPORT OPTIONS

- Once the team has completed its thorough assessment, it can use the information gathered to develop individualized plans to provide appropriate, student-focused interventions, resources, and supports designed to manage and reduce any risk of harm.

- Any student assessed by the multidisciplinary team as posing a risk of harm to themselves or others should receive an individualized support and management plan tailored to their unique behaviors, needs, strengths, and stressors designed to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. If data collected during the assessment indicate that behaviors are interfering with a student's academic or functional performance the team should consider if a referral for special education evaluation is appropriate.

- BTAM teams should consider the four guiding principles for support and management (see Figure 1 on page 12) when establishing plans. This includes adopting a prevention mindset and establishing plans that:

    - Address factors of concern and promote positive factors,
    - Redirect possible motivations for violence,
    - Create an environment in which violence is less likely, and
    - Leverage collaboration with the student, their family, school staff, and community partners who can contribute to the student's success. This will help fully address the contextual factors contributing to the student's behaviors, needs, or stressors. Inviting the student to actively participate in the support planning process can enhance buy-in and engagement.

- Given the risks and adverse outcomes associated with exclusionary discipline, support and management plans should prioritize interventions that promote or restore connection and belonging and minimize a student's time excluded from the learning environment, if possible.

- Teams should meet regularly to monitor the plan's implementation and the student's level of progress and success.

STEP 7: CREATE AND PROMOTE A SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE

- Schools should actively maintain positive school climates featuring safe, respectful, and trusting cultures that support students' social and emotional well-being, while clearly specifying expected school behaviors needed to maintain an effective learning environment.

- All school staff should encourage communication between adults and students, intervene in social conflicts, and actively confront bullying behavior.

- Schools should encourage and support teachers in building positive, trusting relationships with students and work to create an environment where students feel seen, heard, connected, and cared for. This will empower students to share concerning behavior when they observe it.

STEP 8: PROVIDE TRAINING FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

- School safety is everyone's responsibility. Everyone has a role to play in prevention.
- BTAM teams should identify the training needs of all prevention partners, including faculty, staff, administrators, students, parents/guardians, school resource officers, and community-based partners such as local law enforcement.
- Anyone who may observe concerning behavior or notice concerning communications should be trained in what to report and how, and those involved in the assessment process should receive training to prepare them for success in identifying, assessing, and intervening when concerns arise.
- Teams are encouraged to provide training tailored to the audience's unique needs that address the goals and purpose of the behavioral threat assessment approach, the steps and processes involved, the type of information that should be brought forward, and how individuals can report their concerns.

For more information on these eight best practices, see *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model*[3] (National Threat Assessment Center, 2018).

WHAT IS THE PBIS FRAMEWORK?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) represents a powerful application of the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework in educational settings. As a comprehensive public health approach, PBIS promotes safe, positive, predictable, and effective learning environments that include and benefit all students. Recent research demonstrates that when schools implement PBIS with fidelity, they see significant improvements in behavior, well-being, attendance, and academic performance, while experiencing reductions in harassment, bullying, and disciplinary actions that exclude students from learning opportunities (Santiago-Rosario et al., 2023).

PBIS implementation prioritizes equitable **practices**, **data**, and **systems** to enhance meaningful outcomes for all students. Equitable implementation intentionally uses practices, data, and systems to allow each and every student, in all types of schools, to (a) access high-quality safe and affirming learning environments, (b) engage in a full range of educational opportunities, (c) access effective supports based on their

strengths and needs, and (d) experience benefit, valued outcomes, and educational excellence. Although identified outcomes frequently include improvements in school climate and/or students' SEB or academic performance, outcomes should always be locally meaningful, collaboratively defined, and aligned with specific strengths and needs within the school. The clear identification of outcomes guides teams in the selection of practices, the use of data for decision-making, and the development of systems within the PBIS framework.

Practices are the evidence-based supports and interventions provided to students to address valued outcomes and goals. In the PBIS framework, practices are organized within a continuum. Universal, or Tier 1, practices are provided to all students to proactively support student SEB needs and to proactively promote connection and belonging. Targeted, or Tier 2, practices are provided to small groups of students who are identified as needing supplemental support. Individualized, or Tier 3, practices are intensive and individualized to support students who need support beyond what is offered in Tiers 1 and 2.

Data guide decision-making and all aspects of implementation. Leadership teams use multiple sources of data (e.g., attendance, discipline, academic, staff/student/family surveys, and rates of students experiencing homelessness) to assess strengths and needs within the school community and select a continuum of evidence-based practices that are aligned with documented needs and valued school and community outcomes. Teams then assess the implementation fidelity and student outcomes associated with selected practices and adjust implementation supports and intensity to improve effectiveness for each and every student.

Systems, in PBIS, represent the infrastructure that supports implementation and sustainability. Example systems include communication plans, training, and coaching supports to ensure all educators have the support they need to implement selected

practices effectively. They also include action planning routines; procedures to ensure selected practices and data are used consistently and effectively; and procedures for ensuring the active engagement of students, staff, and families in all elements of implementation.

Practices, **data**, and **systems** are implemented across a continuum of prevention and support from universal (Tier 1), to targeted (Tier 2), to individualized (Tier 3; see Figure 2). As the intensity of need increases, the precision with which systems and data are used to support implementation must also increase. A representative leadership team guides PBIS implementation. These teams are organized across the tiers of support and are representative of the school and community. This ensures a range of expertise and experiences are considered in implementation and data-informed decision-making at the school and district levels. Effective teams develop clear communication systems, roles, and operating procedures to ensure all team members are fully included in decision-making processes. Leadership teams intentionally implement practices, data, and systems in a way that ensures all members of the school community can meaningfully participate, experience belonging and success, and achieve valued outcomes. Teams focus on both supporting and monitoring individual student success for all students and identifying and removing systemic barriers to access or achievement. When PBIS is implemented with fidelity, it includes active use of data to guide implementation and engagement with students, families, and community members to support the development of intervention components and to monitor and adjust implementation as needed.

FIGURE 2 SAMPLE PRACTICES, DATA, AND SYSTEMS WITHIN A TIERED SYSTEM OF DELIVERY

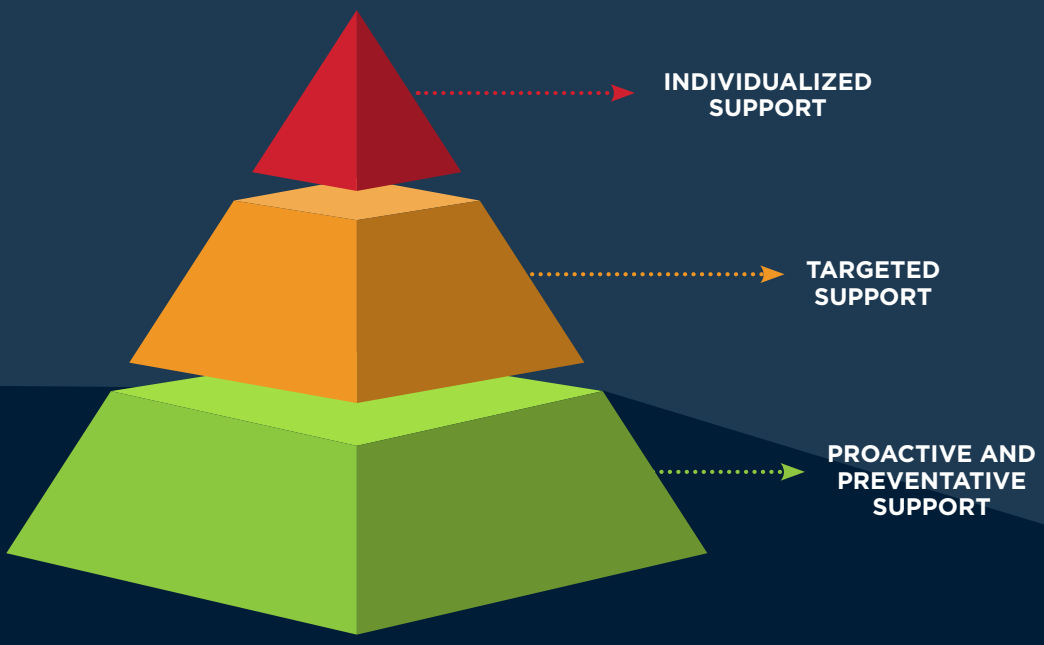


FIGURE 2 *CONTINUED*

SAMPLE PRACTICES, DATA, AND SYSTEMS WITHIN A TIERED SYSTEM OF DELIVERY

	PRACTICES	DATA	SYSTEMS
TIER 3 (INDIVIDUALIZED)	• Aligned with Tier 1 and 2 supports • Designed with student and family individualized instructional support plan	Uses multiple sources of data including Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) to: • Inform individual supports • Monitor individual student plan implementation and impact and adjust plan as needed • Monitor screening, entry and exit criteria, and intervention effectiveness for all Tier 3 supports	• Organize and support educators' awareness and implementation of individualized support plans • Monitor Tier 3 support needs and provide feedback to inform adjustments to Tiers 1 and 2
TIER 2 (TARGETED)	• Aligned with Tier 1 supports • Explicitly teach targeted SEB skills • Increase opportunities for practice with both positive and corrective instructional feedback using at least a 5:1 ratio	Uses multiple sources of data to: • Identify students who may benefit from Tier 2 supports • Establish and monitor entry and exit criteria for Tier 2 interventions • Monitor individual student and aggregate performance and adjust • Monitor intervention effectiveness for all Tier 2 supports	• Organizes and supports educators' awareness and implementation of Tier 2 supports • Monitor Tier 2 support needs and provide feedback to inform adjustments to Tiers 1 and 3
TIER 1 (UNIVERSAL)	• Prioritize connection and belonging • Codesign schoolwide and classroom-wide expectations • SEB skill instruction for all students • Structures to support a culture of acknowledgment and appreciation • Clearly defined instructional and supportive responses to student behaviors	Uses multiple sources of data from both within (e.g., climate surveys, attendance, academics, discipline) and community (e.g., social determinants of health) to: • Inform the design of Tier 1 systems and practices • Monitor implementation and impact of Tier 1 practices and systems	• Process for assessing individual student needs and level of support • District-wide access to external agency supports (e.g., mental health)

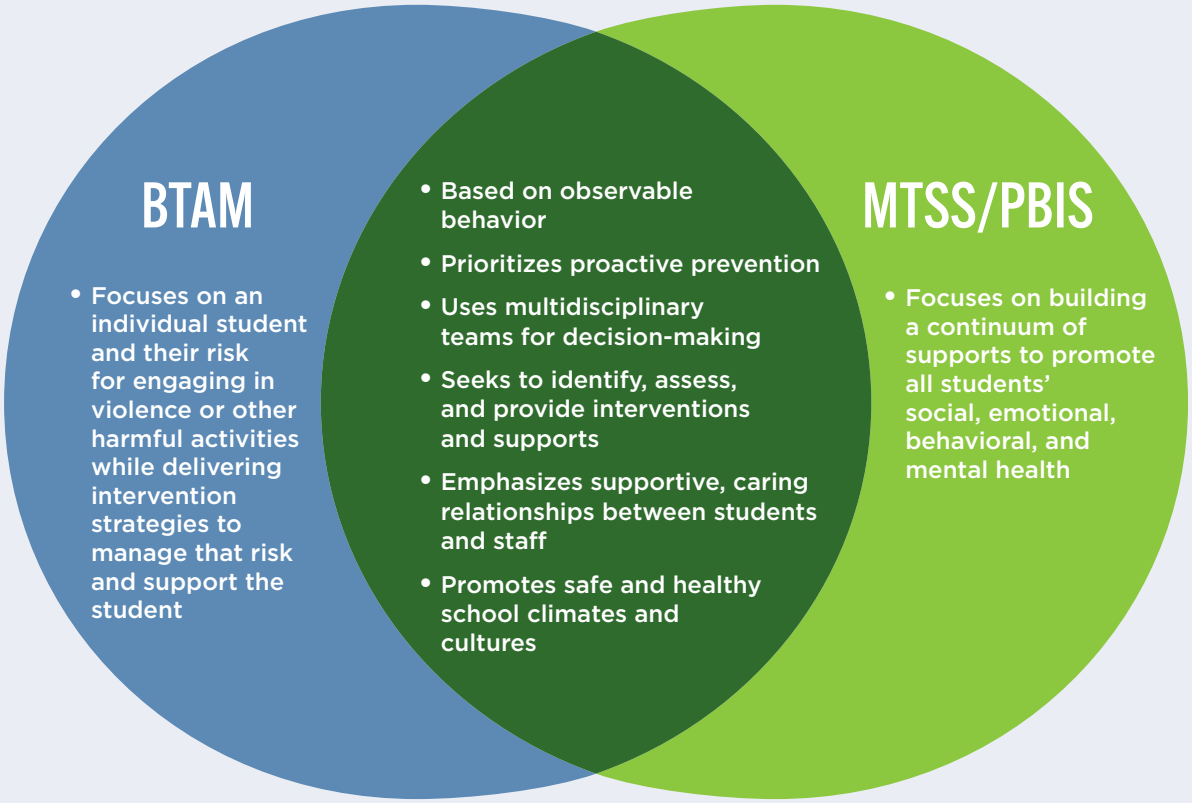
The specific practices implemented within each tier are selected and supported by the leadership team. Core universal, or Tier 1, practices include intentional efforts to prioritize belonging and connection for all, clearly codefining and teaching schoolwide and classroom expectations, developing systems of acknowledgment and appreciation, and clearly defining instructional and supportive responses to behaviors that do not align with established expectations and values. Core, Tier 2, or targeted practices include systems for identifying students needing additional supports and a range of small group interventions designed to support student internalizing and externalizing SEB needs. Intensive and individualized, or Tier 3, practices are guided by an individualized comprehensive assessment used to inform a plan of support developed in partnership with students and families. These include preventative strategies and supports to develop healthy SEB competencies/skills and prevent concerning behaviors. Core practices across tiers are progress monitored at the student and system level to ensure implementation fidelity and intended impact.

For more information on PBIS implementation, its essential elements, and the tiered system of delivery, see the *PBIS Implementation Blueprint*[5] (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2023) or visit the topic-specific pages for *Tier 1,*[6] *Tier 2,*[7] *Tier 3,*[8] and *Equitable Supports*[9] at www.pbis.org.[10]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR BTAM AND MTSS/PBIS WORKING IN CONJUNCTION

The above sections illustrate that BTAM and PBIS align in several ways. Both are behavior-based and emphasize student behavior as a form of communication and an indicator of well-being. Each also focuses on proactive and preventative supports and utilizes multidisciplinary teams to identify students in need, assess their behaviors in context, and provide appropriate interventions and supports. Moreover, both accentuate the value of supportive, trusted, caring relationships between students and staff and the importance of a safe, healthy school climate and culture.

In schools, the PBIS framework provides the opportunity for a BTAM team to utilize existing school resources and work cooperatively with a broader system of prevention designed to provide equitable access to proactive, early intervention for students in



need of support. Relatedly, BTAM supports PBIS implementation by expanding the continuum of interventions and supports available for students who are engaging in concerning or threatening behavior. A collaborative approach such as this serves to strengthen a positive school climate and promote student emotional and physical well-being.

Responsibility for student safety, preventions, and supports may be shared across multiple school teams (e.g., school safety teams, MTSS/PBIS, student/teacher assistance teams, BTAM). School leadership should determine how teams will address, support, and align aspects such as school safety and climate; clarify goals and roles to avoid duplication; and efficiently attend to matters of prevention, safety, and student support needs. The intent of this section is to illustrate how BTAM and MTSS/PBIS can work together to enrich supports for students and staff and enhance implementation efficiency and effectiveness.

SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT STAFF

Systems represent the infrastructure and operational supports necessary to help adults successfully implement and sustain practices designed to support students and aid achievement of valued outcomes. Policies, operational guides, procedures, professional development and training, and communication plans are all examples

of systems-level components that support staff toward greater levels of implementation fidelity and also make implementation more sustainable, durable, and accessible to each and every student.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM WITH INTEGRATED MEMBERSHIP

Teaming is essential for implementing BTAM and multi-tiered frameworks such as PBIS (Eber et al., 2019). In PBIS, the leadership team guides implementation, monitors effectiveness, and provides continuity across contexts (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2023). Similarly, a school's BTAM team guides implementation by receiving reports about concerning behaviors and situations, gathering additional information, assessing the risk of harm posed and to whom, and developing intervention and management strategies to reduce risk. Both MTSS/PBIS and BTAM emphasize the multidisciplinary representation of skill sets among team members to ensure that varying points of view are represented and that access to information and resources is broad (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMING ACROSS BTAM AND MTSS/PBIS

BTAM TEAM	MTSS/PBIS LEADERSHIP TEAM
A multidisciplinary team including, but not limited to, representation from: • General education • Special education • Administration • Individuals with SEB expertise (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists) • Individuals with mental health expertise • School nurses or health room coordinators • School safety specialists (e.g., school resource officer) • Community partners	**A multidisciplinary team including, but not limited to, representation from:** • General education • Special education • Administration • Individuals with SEB expertise (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists) • Individuals with coaching and training expertise • Members from underserved groups • Family and student representation • Community partners
INTEGRATED REPRESENTATION	**INTEGRATED REPRESENTATION**
• Individuals with detailed knowledge about the school's current MTSS/PBIS initiative	• Individuals with detailed knowledge about the school's current BTAM initiative

One promising approach for aligning BTAM and MTSS/PBIS is to expand team membership for both by integrating membership across the teams and then defining roles and expectations for collaboration. Adding partners across teams can provide an expanded view of the two frameworks, the practices implemented to support students to better outcomes, and the data available to inform support strategies. For example, integrating a member of the PBIS leadership team onto the BTAM team can help provide a greater level of awareness of the available behavioral data and the full menu of universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and intensive (Tier 3) supports available to layer and match to student needs during the behavioral threat assessment and management process. As well, integrating a member of the BTAM team onto the PBIS leadership team can help promote early identification of concerning and/or threatening behaviors and early intervention. Clearly defined teaming procedures can support efficient and effective team functioning and decision-making and are particularly important when dealing with stressful high-pressure situations. For more information on effective teaming, see *Enhancing Team Functioning in Schools' Multi-Tiered Systems of Support*[11] (Splett et al., 2023)

SCHOOL EXAMPLE: INTEGRATED TEAM

A school is implementing BTAM and MTSS/PBIS and wants to ensure that both teams are actively aligned in their shared missions of prevention and support. The school's administration works collaboratively with the leaders of the BTAM team, the MTSS/PBIS Tier 1 team, and the MTSS/PBIS Tier 2 and 3 combined team to review each team's composition and identify opportunities for crossover membership. Having BTAM representation present at the Tier 1 team meetings helps to enhance awareness of additional support systems and interventions for students with intensive needs. Likewise, having BTAM representation and expertise present at the Tier 2 and 3 combined team meetings helps to build capacity for early identification and early intervention for students in distress or who may be displaying concerning and/or threatening behavior. Similarly, having MTSS/PBIS representation present at the BTAM team meetings helps to enhance knowledge and expertise in the school's larger SEB support framework and leverage existing school resources for students receiving individualized management and support plans or individualized safety plans (e.g., BTAM interventions explicitly linked to existing Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports).

DISTRICT EXAMPLE: INTEGRATED TEAM

A district has an established leadership team focused on current initiatives regarding the prevention of unwanted outcomes and which addresses matters regarding school climate, school safety, and students' SEB well-being. The district's BTAM coordinator is an active member of the team to enhance awareness and connection to the work of the school-based BTAM teams across the district. The district's MTSS/PBIS coordinator is an active member of the team to provide knowledge about current SEB programming across the district and campus-level efforts to enhance school climate. Having the district's BTAM coordinator and MTSS/PBIS coordinator both serve on this leadership team helps build capacity to identify natural points of alignment and opportunities to work in conjunction.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

The PBIS leadership team and the BTAM team purposefully support students in unique yet complementary ways. Because of this, schools should consider establishing systems to facilitate two-way communication regarding implementation processes, progress, and outcomes as a means to enhance alignment and integration. Regular, two-way communication allows important information about students in need or distress to be shared with the team best suited to provide support. Regular team communication also helps safeguard against siloed information and promotes group cooperation for enhanced student support.

Professional development and training are core features of the successful implementation of any program or practice. Because school safety is everyone's responsibility, teams working to align BTAM with the PBIS framework should consider the training needs of faculty, staff, administrators, school resource officers, and local law enforcement.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING: FACULTY, STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATORS

To set all members of the school community up for success, teams should provide professional development and training opportunities to acquire new knowledge and build new skills. All staff should receive training on core, universal (Tier 1) PBIS elements to better understand schoolwide and classroom expectations, acknowledgment and appreciation systems, and response to behaviors that do not align with established expectations and values. Additionally, each adult on campus,

including administrative, maintenance, custodial, and food service staff, should receive training on understanding the purpose and processes of behavioral threat assessment and management as a means of violence prevention (National Threat Assessment Center, 2018). Training topics can include recognizing concerning and/or threatening behavior or communications, as well as what information should be brought forward and the multiple methods to do so (e.g., direct communication, phone line, email or online form, text or mobile application). Training on other topics such as suicide awareness and prevention, conflict resolution, bullying prevention, developmental disabilities, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma, and mental health first aid can also support universal prevention efforts and assist school faculty, staff, and administrators with fostering positive school climates. Relatedly, a comprehensive dissemination plan around awareness and prevention efforts that includes how to access systems of support should be included for non-staff members of the school community such as families and students and staff who are unable to attend training due to contractual or logistical barriers (e.g., transportation, teacher assistants, food service).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

While not every campus will have a school resource officer, all schools can develop positive, proactive relationships with local law enforcement agencies and personnel who may be asked to respond when highly concerning, threatening, or violent behavior emerges. Some schools proactively build partnerships by encouraging officers to coteach classes, serve as coaches or assistant coaches of sports teams, and/or work with parents and teachers at after-school events. When assigning a dedicated school resource officer is not possible, some local law enforcement agencies have encouraged officers to "adopt a school" and regularly visit the school to greet and become familiar with students and teachers, eat lunch on

campus, or complete paperwork in an office on campus (National Threat Assessment Center, 2018).

Like faculty, staff, and administrators, school resource officers and local law enforcement need training to increase their awareness of the school's behavioral threat assessment and management process and their role in it. Moreover, training on additional topics, such as child development, conflict resolution, bullying prevention, students with disabilities, unintentional assumptions of student backgrounds, ACEs and trauma, mental health first aid, and specific schoolwide programs and practices can better position all officers to promote positive school climates and support the school's Tier 1 prevention efforts.

Table 2 summarizes important systems-level considerations for each of the three tiers within the MTSS/PBIS framework.

TABLE 2: ALIGNED SYSTEMS-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS ACROSS MTSS/PBIS TIERS OF SUPPORT

TIER 1 UNIVERSAL AWARENESS AND PREVENTION	TIER 2 EARLY IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT, AND TARGETED INTERVENTION	TIER 3 INDIVIDUALIZED, INTENSIVE INTERVENTION AND REPORTING
TEAMING AND COMMUNICATION		
Across All Tiers • Multidisciplinary team with integrated membership and expertise (i.e., BTAM and MTSS/PBIS representation) • Clearly defined team processes for meetings, decision-making, and action planning • Two-way communication between BTAM and MTSS/PBIS teams		
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING AND DISSEMINATION EFFORTS		
• Core Tier 1 practices and data systems • Recognizing concerning and/or threatening behavior • Reporting mechanisms • Understanding adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	• Core Tier 1 and Tier 2 practices and data systems • Mental health first aid • De-escalation techniques • Trauma-informed care	• Core Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 practices and data systems • Functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention planning • Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM)
IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION SUPPORTS		
• District-wide/Schoolwide supports for responding to behavior	• Assessment systems for early identification • Continuum of interventions matched to student needs (e.g., social skills instruction)	• Process for assessing individual student needs and level of support • District-wide access to external agency supports (e.g., mental health)

PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

Practices represent the evidence-based interventions and supports educators implement to positively impact student behavior and address desired outcomes (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2023). Within a continuum of support aligned with MTSS/PBIS, educators implement universal practices to proactively support all student SEB needs (Tier 1), provide targeted practices to small groups of students identified as needing supplemental support (Tier 2), and individualize and intensify select practices to support students with more significant SEB needs (Tier 3). By working in conjunction with a school's MTSS/PBIS team, a BTAM team can leverage the full continuum of practices, supports, and interventions to enhance their supports for students in distress. Likewise, by collaborating with the school's BTAM team, an MTSS/PBIS team can amplify its efforts for prevention and intervention across the tiers.

Individual practices should be evidence-based, aligned to documented needs, layered, and aligned across tiers. For example, in a layered approach a student receiving Tier 3 supports would also have access to supports at Tiers 1 and 2 (see Figure 3). Language and intervention approaches should be aligned and complementary across tiers, meaning Tier 2 and 3 interventions should use similar language and support Tier 1 and 2 practices. Within a multi-tiered framework such as this, practitioners may wonder how students with disabilities are meaningfully included (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Common misperceptions and "myths" include (a) believing that Tier 3 is special education and (b) that students in special education need only Tier 3 supports to be successful (Simonsen et al., 2020). In actuality, students with disabilities are best supported when they are meaningfully included and receive supports across all tiers (Cheney et al., 2004; Grasley-Boy et al., 2019; Tobin et al., 2012).

FIGURE 3

SAMPLE ALIGNED PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

INTENSIVE INTERVENTION AND REPORTING

- Comprehensive assessments (including functional behavioral assessments)
- Individualized management and support plans
- Individualized safety plans
- Wraparound supports

EARLY IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT, & TARGETED INTERVENTION

- SEB skill development
- Small groups (e.g., anger management, conflict resolution, social skills, trauma)
- School-based mental health supports
- Targeted supports for internalizing behaviors
- Check-In/Check-Out
- Triage
- Safety checks
- Bullying and harassment prevention

INTENSIVE INTERVENTION AND REPORTING

- Cultivate positive, connected, encouraging, unconditional relationships
- Teach prosocial behavior
- Enhanced SEB learning
- Teach students how to recognize concerns in peers
- Teach families how to recognize concerning behavior
- Teach students and families how to report concerns as an act of caring
- Bullying and harassment prevention
- Suicide prevention
- Mental health first aid

For more information on the various supports across the tiers, see the Center on PBIS's *Tier 1*,[6] *Tier 2*,[7] and *Tier 3*,[8] topic pages. For more guidance on intensive and individualized supports, see the Tier 3 Student-level Systems Guide,[12] Tier 3 School-level Systems Guide,[13] and Tier 3 District-level Systems Guide.[14] For strategies and guidance on creating and enhancing a central reporting system, see *Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting: A Toolkit for Strengthening K-12 Reporting Programs*[4] (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency & U.S. Secret Service, 2023).

SCHOOL EXAMPLE: PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

A BTAM team is developing an individualized management and support plan for a student who poses a risk of harm to themselves or others. As part of the planning process, the team reviews an inventory of existing school-based resources that can be leveraged across tiers (e.g., counselor-led groups, targeted interventions, functional behavioral assessment and planning, scheduling changes). By working to link the management and support plan to current Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports based upon the student's behaviors, needs, strengths, and stressors, the BTAM team enhances efficiency in its development of an individualized plan. As well, because the MTSS/PBIS teams have worked to document evidence of effectiveness for all interventions and supports, the BTAM team is better positioned to select effective practices as it tailors the plan to the student.

DISTRICT EXAMPLE: PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

A district is implementing the targeted intervention Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) as part of its Tier 2 supports. The district's coordinator for MTSS/PBIS partners with the district's director of district safety and security to have all of the school safety specialists on staff across the district trained in de-escalation techniques and as CICO implementers. In this capacity, they check in with students with targeted needs at the start of the day to provide encouragement before class and again at the end of the day to provide a positive touchpoint before the student leaves. Through this process of regular feedback, the school safety specialists build rapport and relationships with students which helps increase engagement, decrease isolation, and promote a system for the student to proactively seek support from an adult.

DATA TO GUIDE DECISION-MAKING

The collection and use of data for decision-making are critical to multi-tiered prevention efforts. At all tiers, teams should consider two primary sources of information. The first is fidelity data. That is, to what extent were the plans or interventions implemented as intended? The second is outcome data. That is, to what extent are students benefiting from the interventions or plans? Together, these data sources can guide a continuous improvement model (see Table 3). This process begins with teams using data to understand the current context and identify goals and objectives for improvement and specific evidence-based practices aligned with those goals. Next, teams use data to identify supports and barriers to improvement and develop systems to support the implementation of selected practices. Then, the team implements the plans and monitors the extent to which they are implemented as intended. This ensures that all students can access the intervention before determining its effectiveness. Finally, teams evaluate the effectiveness of the plans and ensure all students are benefiting as expected. New goals and objectives are identified as needed, and the process continues.

All data must be used to promote improved student outcomes and not punish educators or students for failed implementation or outcomes. If implementation goals or student outcomes are not realized, teams should return to the process of evaluating strengths and barriers in the system and adjust the plans by increasing implementation supports or increasing the intensity of the plan's components. For more information on using a continuous improvement process to guide implementation, see the *PBIS Implementation Blueprint*[5] (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2023). Using data for decision-making within this framework can support BTAM teams by facilitating access to a range of data sources that can be used to fully understand the context of any concerning behaviors and systems for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of support and management plans when needed.

TABLE 3: ALIGNED FIDELITY AND OUTCOME DATA MEASURES

	TIER 1 UNIVERSAL AWARENESS AND PREVENTION	TIER 2 EARLY IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT, AND TARGETED INTERVENTION	TIER 3 INDIVIDUALIZED, INTENSIVE INTERVENTION AND REPORTING
FIDELITY DATA	• Team assessment of MTSS/PBIS implementation (e.g., Tiered Fidelity Inventory [TFI][15]) • Fidelity measures for specific practices	• Team assessment of MTSS/PBIS implementation (e.g., TFI[15]) • Fidelity measures for specific interventions • BTAM and other MTSS/PBIS teams	• Team assessment of MTSS/PBIS implementation (e.g., TFI[15]) • Individual management and support plan fidelity monitoring
OUTCOME DATA	• School climate surveys • Community data • Behavior referrals • Universal SEB screeners	• Intervention-specific progress monitoring and outcome data	• Individual management and support plan progress monitoring toward individualized goals and objectives

SCHOOL EXAMPLE: DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING

A BTAM team is building a management and support plan for a student whose motivation is grievance-based due to experiences with bullying and harassment. The team connects with the MTSS/PBIS Tier 1 team to get information on the reported bullying and harassment events so that it can use the data regarding locations, times, others involved, bullying behaviors, etc. to guide its decision-making and more effectively address factors of concern for the student, direct resources to address the student's motives, and create an environment in which violence is less likely. The BTAM team uses the information to guide modifications to the student's daily schedule to reduce the likelihood it will have contact with the students perpetrating the bullying and harassment. As well, the BTAM team works collaboratively with the MTSS/PBIS Tier 2 team to include the student in an existing social skills group led by the counselor to receive additional instruction and support their identified SEB needs (e.g., anger management, conflict resolution, social skills). Following implementation of a management and support plan, the MTSS/PBIS Tier 1 team continues to share data on new reports of bullying and harassment with the BTAM team so that it can stay aware and informed as they work to support the student. The MTSS/PBIS Tier 2 team shares both fidelity and outcome data for the social skills group which the BTAM team uses during its meeting to progress monitor implementation of the management and support plan and the student's level of success.

SCHOOL EXAMPLE: DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING

The BTAM team and the MTSS/PBIS teams all play an active role in creating and sustaining a safe and positive school climate with a culture of respect, trust, and support for students' social-emotional well-being. Leaders from the respective teams work collaboratively with school administrators to review data from the current school climate survey. Together, they analyze data on students' perceptions of feeling connected to the school, supported by adults in the school, their own safety at school, and their perceptions regarding order and discipline at school. Additionally, they analyze data from staff on their perceptions of their own safety at school and examines data on parents' perceptions of their student's safety at school as well as their perceptions of the degree to which their student is supported and treated fairly by adults within the school. The group knows that a positive school climate is directly related to student willingness to share and report concerning and/or threatening behaviors. Collectively, the group establishes an action plan designed to support all staff with building positive, trusting relationships with students and which outlines practices and resources that can foster an environment where students feel seen, heard, connected, and respected.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGHOUT THE BTAM PROCESS

Multi-tiered systems of support, like PBIS, include all students across all levels of support – including students with disabilities.[16] At the Tier 1 level, students with disabilities (SWD), like all students, benefit from a varied menu of universal supports that are well-designed and intended to set all students up for success through proactive prevention. These universal supports facilitate inclusive school cultures that benefit students with disabilities. Additionally, like all students, students with disabilities may have targeted and intensive needs that can be supported by Tier 2 and Tier 3 programming (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2023). Throughout the entire continuum of support, students with disabilities also continue

to receive specially designed instruction to meet their unique needs (i.e., IEP). Like all students, students with disabilities who display concerning and/or threatening behaviors should be supported by the BTAM process. Additionally, their unique protections require enhanced collaboration, coordination, knowledge of legal protections, and communication.

SWD are afforded special protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and school teams must ensure these protections are afforded to SWD or those in the special education referral process during and following BTAM. SWD are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). FAPE is supported through a team-based program development process, and programming must be designed to enable academic and behavioral progress in light of the student's circumstances. When a student's behavior interferes with their learning or the learning of others, the team must meet to "consider positive behavioral interventions and supports and other strategies to address the behavior" (34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(2), 2024, *Development, review, and revision of IEP*). SWD are also entitled to disciplinary protections in cases where they are removed from school, or their placement is changed.

While BTAM focuses on early intervention and proactive supports and is not intended to be a disciplinary process, it is important to recognize that it may coincide with disciplinary measures or temporary changes in placement that have implications for SWD. The BTAM process operates alongside special education protections and does not replace or supersede these protections.

Supporting SWD begins by establishing a strong multi-tiered system of support that promotes a culture of connectedness and belonging for all students. This culture provides the foundation for the early identification of needs and timely and effective interventions for students regardless of IDEA or 504 status. Early identification and intervention can prevent or reduce the need for more intensive support later. As part of their MTSS/PBIS implementation process, teams should ensure that SWD are fully included in and benefiting from all tiers of interventions. In addition to establishing a strong system of preventative support, teams can take further actions to ensure SWD are supported and protected whenever BTAM is involved.

Behavioral threat assessment and management **operates alongside special education protections** and does not replace or supersede these protections.

The following considerations are recommended for school teams to ensure SWD are effectively supported during the BTAM process. Additionally, they are provided to help teams understand the specific protections that must be afforded to SWD and when those may apply.

TEAMING

The BTAM team must include one or more individual(s) with knowledge of federal and state special education laws and regulations, even if the referred student is not currently identified as having a disability. This individual can help the team understand procedural requirements (e.g., relevant timelines, evaluation procedures) and substantive requirements (e.g., when to convene the entire IEP team, interpretation of previous evaluations, the applicability of change of placement determinations). This expertise can help protect against over-referral to special education and ensure appropriate protections are in place throughout the BTAM process.

In the case of a BTAM referral for a student who currently has an IEP or 504 plan or is currently in the evaluation process, key members of that student's individualized team must be included in the BTAM process. Anytime behaviors of a SWD rise to the level of a threat assessment, the full IEP team, including the parents and student (if over age 15), should meet to review the IEP, consider necessary changes to appropriately address the student's behavior(s) and needs, and any needed evaluations (e.g., FBA).

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS

In general, BTAM procedures for identifying student concerns should be fully inclusive of SWD. That is, BTAM referrals for SWD should follow the same schoolwide procedures as for any other student, but with the inclusion of the student's IEP team in the threat assessment process. SWD should be included in any existing schoolwide screening or data systems MTSS/PBIS or BTAM teams use to assess risk or make referrals. This ensures that teams can access the information they need to make informed decisions. However, it is also important to recognize that SWD, especially those of color, are more likely to be referred for concerning behavior (Burnette et al., 2020; Cornell et al., 2018). Teams should monitor referrals and outcomes to ensure SWD are not overrepresented in BTAM procedures. Schools can improve reporting accuracy by ensuring that clear definitions of concerning behavior are developed and shared and include examples and non-examples that support differentiating individual characteristics that may be related to a student's personal identity (i.e., their disability) from clearly concerning and/or threatening behaviors.

Additionally, under Child Find, a part of the IDEA, schools are responsible for identifying and evaluating students needing specialized services and supports. Because concerning behaviors may indicate unmet needs related to a disability,

schools should consider whether a special education evaluation referral is warranted whenever a behavioral threat assessment is conducted. While a referral for special education evaluation should be considered in each case, only cases that uncover potential unmet needs related to qualifying disability categories should be referred for special education evaluation.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Once a BTAM referral is made, schools must gather all relevant information. For SWD, several protections must be considered. First, schools must document access to special education records, including in progress or previous referrals for evaluation, to ensure that those records are not accessed without parental permission except by those with a legitimate educational right to know the contents of the records. Members of the BTAM team, including any formal and regular team members not employed by the district, are generally considered part of this exception meaning they may be able to access the student's records. Schools should have clear procedures for identifying when and by whom these records are accessed and for ensuring that all members of the BTAM team understand their responsibilities related to confidentiality.

Second, if the BTAM team recommends additional evaluations, then the entire IEP team must be involved in determining the scope of those evaluations, and all notification and evaluation procedures and timelines must be followed. Further, to ensure that the concerning behaviors are understood in the context of the student's disability, BTAM teams must be intentional about engaging in dialogue with the student, family members, and members of the IEP team, as well as those who know the student best during the interview and information-gathering process. Additionally, the information-gathering process must include a review of existing IEP services and the extent to which those were delivered as intended as well as a review of the student's present levels of performance and progress toward goals and objectives. These procedures ensure that the impact of the student's disability is clearly understood in relation to the concerning behavior.

ANALYZING INFORMATION

For SWD, it is important to interpret the concerning behavior in the context of the student's disability and to ensure that all relevant behavioral protections are provided. Specifically, due process notifications and manifestation hearing procedures may be relevant for SWD who have engaged in concerning behaviors subject to disciplinary measures. The BTAM team must do more than identify if there is a substantive risk to self or others; the team must work collaboratively with the IEP team to deeply understand the situation in enough detail to increase services and supports effectively. Ensuring that the BTAM team includes individuals with expertise in interpreting relevant special education evaluations, specifically those working closely with the student, should inform BTAM team determinations.

MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT PLANS

For all cases of concerning and/or threatening behavior involving a SWD, the full IEP team should meet to review current IEP or 504 plan supports and services and ensure the student is adequately supported to prevent future concerning behaviors. SWD can benefit from function-based assessments which can be used to better understand the purpose of behaviors interfering with their educational performance and identify any relevant contributing factors. The information gained can help establish function-based supports, interventions, and behaviorial plans to mitigate or eliminate the interfering behavior (Office of Special Eduction and Rehabilitative Services, 2024). Additonally, the team should also consider supports and services that restore or enhance the student's sense of belonging and connection to the school community. For **ALL** students, situations involving weapons, direct threats of violence, or concerns about an individual's safety should warrant immediate intervention aligned with district safety policies.

BTAM and IEP teams must work collaboratively to consider options for enhancing interventions and supports and develop a management and support plan that adequately manages the risk of harm to self or others and adheres to IDEA and 504 requirements. This comprehensive plan should be function-based and aligned with the student's IEP/504 plan services and accommodations. If changes in services or placement are needed, then the full IEP team makes the determination. If the student is removed from the learning environment for an extended time, IEP services must continue to be delivered. Further, when a SWD's behavior results in suspension for more than 10 days (cumulatively or consecutively), the full IEP team must meet to determine if the behavior is directly related to (i.e., a manifestation of) the student's disability and if a change of placement is appropriate. In cases where the behavior is deemed a manifestation of a disability, there are procedural safeguards in IDEA that must be followed for students with disabilities. Additionally, in cases where a student's behavior results in a change of placement or is determined to be a manifestation of their disability, SWD have a right to a function-based assessment and a behavior intervention plan designed to address the behavior (34 C.F.R. § 300.530(d)(1)(ii) and (f)(1)(i), 2024, *Authority of School Personnel*; 34 C.F.R. § 300.534, 2024, *Protections for children not determined eligible for special education and related services*). Meanwhile, BTAM teams can also review and enhance schoolwide safety procedures, supervision protocols, and reporting mechanisms to support safety for **ALL** students.

Implementation of all BTAM management and support plans as well as IEP/504 plans should be linked directly to a school's advanced tier systems of support (i.e., Tier 2, Tier 3) to ensure implementation is monitored regularly and plans are adjusted to ensure students fully benefit from supports.

A student with a disability is identified by the BTAM team as engaging in concerning behaviors such as an excessive interest in past acts of school violence and making contextually inappropriate comments about harming others. School administration determines these behaviors violate school expectations.

SCENARIO

NEXT STEPS...

IEP

The IEP team meets and determines that the behaviors are a manifestation of the student's disability, meaning the student cannot be disciplined or excluded from school for this behavior. However, the BTAM team remains concerned about the potential for harm to self or others and determines that a support and management plan is warranted. The BTAM team works collaboratively with the IEP team to develop the plan that includes increasing some IEP services related to improving social interactions and connections while also increasing supervision and support during unstructured times and when the student has access to the internet. Together, the BTAM and IEP teams develop agreements with the student and family to restrict access to weapons and agree to meet again in a month to review and adjust the plan.

BTAM

Additionally, the BTAM team works to support the safety of all students by increasing active supervision in hallways during transitions, reviewing and enhancing entry/exit procedures and building-wide safety protocols, reducing access to unsupervised locations, enhancing learning opportunities, and sharing reminders for how to recognize and report concerning behavior.

CONCLUSION

BTAM is a student safety and support process to address potential safety risks and provide student support and intervention. When implemented in conjunction, the PBIS framework provides a structure for the BTAM team to leverage existing resources and capacities to prevent targeted violence and enhance the overall well-being of staff and students, and align with a broader system of prevention designed to provide access to proactive and early intervention for all students needing support. Likewise, BTAM supports the PBIS framework by enhancing intensive intervention systems for students who may pose a risk of harm to themselves or those around them. Together, BTAM and MTSS/PBIS teams can create more cohesive and comprehensive approaches to student safety and well-being and build safer, more supportive environments for all students. Such approaches that promote successful outcomes for all students can decrease the risk of harm to the school community (National Threat Assessment Center, 2021).

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR GETTING STARTED

Whether a school is implementing BTAM and wants to extend its prevention and intervention options by adding MTSS/PBIS or is implementing MTSS/PBIS and wants to enhance its intensive interventions by incorporating BTAM, the following questions can help guide next steps:

1. What teams or initiatives already exist to promote school safety, climate, or behavioral support?

TEAM/INITIATIVE	PRIMARY FOCUS OR CONCERN ADDRESSED	TEAM MEMBERSHIP	FIDELITY DATA COLLECTED (Y/N)	OUTCOME DATA COLLECTED (Y/N)	COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING ROUTINES WITH OTHER TEAMS

2. What opportunities exist to combine, collaborate, enhance, or add as needed?

- Do multiple teams address the same primary focus or concern?
- If fidelity or outcome data are not collected for the work conducted by the team, how could they be added?
- If an area of school climate or safety is not addressed, what is missing?

3. What are the specific desired outcomes or goals that can be achieved by aligning the work?

- What are the strengths of our current system that we want to maintain?
- What are the gaps or needs in our system that we want to address?
- What aspects of BTAM and/or MTSS/PBIS can we use to improve the effectiveness and efficiency within our systems of support?

4. What specific practices, data, and systems are needed to achieve the desired outcomes or goals?

OUTCOME	PRACTICES	DATA	SYSTEMS
What do we hope to achieve by expanding and aligning our implementation of BTAM and MTSS/PBIS?	*What practices or supports do we need to add to achieve this outcome?*	*What data would we need to know if we are doing these practices as intended?* *What data do we need to know if students are benefiting?*	*How should team membership be adjusted to enhance awareness and expertise across teams?* *How will we communicate and share relevant information across teams?* *What training is needed and who should receive it?* *What ongoing coaching or problem-solving supports are available?*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the implementation of behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) in K-12 settings and NTAC's research, see *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model,*[3] *Protecting America's Schools*,[1] *Averting Targeted School Violence*,[2] and *Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting.*[4] For more information regarding the implementation of the PBIS framework and multi-tiered systems of support, visit the resource pages *What is PBIS?*,[17] *Why Implement PBIS?,*[18] and *Getting Started*[19] from the Center on PBIS.

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EMBEDDED HYPERLINKS

1. https://www.secretservice.gov/node/2565
2. https://www.secretservice.gov/newsroom/reports/threat-assessments/schoolcampus-attacks/details-0
3. https://www.secretservice.gov/newsroom/reports/threat-assessments/schoolcampus-attacks/details
4. https://www.secretservice.gov/newsroom/reports/threat-assessments/schoolcampus-attacks/details-1
5. https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-implementation-blueprint
6. https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-1
7. https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-2
8. https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-3
9. https://www.pbis.org/equity
10. www.pbis.org
11. https://www.pbis.org/resource/enhancing-team-functioning-in-schools-multi-tiered-systems-of-support
12. https://www.pbis.org/resource/tier-3-student-level-systems-guide
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