

What Does it Cost to Implement School-wide PBIS?

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Any school, district or state planning for large scale implementation of School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) faces the question of projected costs. The purpose of this Evaluation Brief is to provide a context for addressing that question. Our preference would be to provide a simple dollar amount that could be applied across budgets. Our experience, however, is that many variables affect the cost of SWPBIS implementation. Although beyond the scope of this document, a more extensive discussion about projected costs should consider associated variables, such as,

1. Number of schools implementing SWPBIS (e.g. economies of scale).
2. Existing district and state capacity for SWPBIS training and coaching.
3. Existing district systems for collecting data that can be used for assessing fidelity and impact of SWPBIS implementation.
4. Proposed level of SWPBIS implementation (Tier I, Tier II, Tier III).
5. Number of competing or concurrent academic and/or behavior related initiatives.

A comprehensive model of variables for calculating Tier I implementation costs has been provided by economists in Blonigen, et al., (2008). This model emphasizes the importance of specifying assumptions about the content of SWPBIS and how these affect costs related to implementation. Basic assumptions about SWPBIS include:

1. SWPBIS is a framework for establishing and supporting a multi-tiered continuum of behavior support for all students.
2. SWPBIS gives priority to evidence-based practices and strategies.
3. SWPBIS emphasizes a prevention approach in which teaching, monitoring, and rewarding social behaviors is done to establish a positive, school-wide, social culture.
4. SWPBIS implementation decisions are guided by implementation phases: exploration, installation, initial and full implementation, and continuous regeneration.
5. SWPBIS is grounded in behavioral theory and applied behavior analysis.

6. SWPBIS invests in data and information systems that enable effective, efficient, and relevant decision making, especially related to fidelity of implementation and student outcomes.
7. SWPBIS implementation considers local cultural context and learning history.

We provide below a condensed summary of projected cost considerations for three common scenarios. We realize that application of the information from these scenarios to specific districts or states will require adaptation. For a more complete discussion of features and elements referenced in the scenarios below we suggest consulting other Evaluation Briefs in this series, and the three PBIS Blueprints (Implementation, Professional Development, and Evaluation) that are available at www.pbis.org.

Scenario A: District Implementation of Tier I SWPBIS with 10–15 Schools as Part of a New Initiative.

Implementation of SWPBIS involves (a) assessing current strengths and assets, then adding only what is needed to achieve the core features of SWPBIS, (b) building capacity at three levels: with school teams, with district coaches/trainers, and with the district leadership team, and (c) 2 to 5 year action planning that considers implementation phases across a multi-tiered continuum of practices and supports. Assigning costs to the required activities/process requires attention to

- (a) Direct transition costs related to external training assistance,
- (b) New on-going, direct costs related to implementing SWPBIS, and
- (c) Opportunity costs related to reallocation of existing resources as part of either the transition or on-going efforts.

To provide a basic template, we assume a district endorses SWPBIS adoption by

- (a) Incorporating student behavior into it's district plan and mission,
- (b) Hiring/accessing external training support to establish SWPBIS implementation capacity,
- (c) Requiring at least one visit from a SWPBIS national consultant to explore and plan feasibility of SWPBIS,
- (d) Considering or adapting a district-wide data system for assessing SWPBIS fidelity and student impact,
- (e) Reallocating personnel for training, coaching and team roles without adding new positions, and
- (f) Being able to achieve implementation of Tier 1 within two years.

Table 1 summarizes the costs for a mid-size district (30–50 schools) beginning the process of implementing SWPBIS with a “pilot” of 15 schools. The Direct Transitional costs of SWPBIS implementation per school for the initial two-year

implementation effort for each of the 15 pilot schools would be \$4,633.00, with additional expenses of at least \$400.00 per school per year for data applications. After the two years of transition, the schools would continue to need access to the data systems, but should not require more than regular district professional support to sustain implementation of SWPBIS. Any district planning for SWPBIS implementation would be wise to take these figures and double them to account for unanticipated additional costs related to staff turnover, additional training requirements, additional data demands, and the potential need to hire additional FTE to assist in implementation coordination. Our experience, however, is that schools launching SWPBIS are able to initiate Tier I implementation at a total unit cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000 per school over a two year period.

Table 1: Scenario A Budget Model

Implementation Focus	Implementation Activities	Direct Transition Costs	New, On-going Direct Costs	Potential Opportunity Costs
15 School Teams with 5-7 individuals per team	Year 1: Three 1.5 day workshops Year 2: Two 1.5 day workshops	\$4000 trainer cost per workshop Personnel time (substitutes): \$600 per school per training	Data System (\$400 per school per year)	Use of Space (dedicated) Teams meets at least twice a month
Coaches/ Trainers (2 trainers per district/ 3 coaches: 1 per 5-7 schools)	Year 1: Three 0.5 day workshops Year 2: Two 0.5 day workshops	External Trainer meets with coaches/trainers around workshops (no additional cost)		Coaches/ Trainers meet at least monthly Coaches/ Trainers re-tasked to work on PBIS.
Leadership Team	Exploration Orientation (0.5 day) Evaluation and Update report Annually (year 1, year 2) (0.5 days)	\$1500 for each visit		Monthly meetings with SWPBIS on the agenda
Year 1 (15 teams)		\$42,000	\$6000	
Year 2 (15 teams)		\$27,500	\$6000	
Total		\$69,500	\$12,000	
Cost per school		\$4,633/ school	\$400/school/ year	

With Unanticipated Additional Costs	Staff turnover, Extra training, Hiring of a District Coordinator	\$9266.00/school	\$400/school/year	
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Scenario B: District Chooses to Scale Up Tier I SWPBIS from an Initial 15 schools to an additional 30 New Schools.

A district that has invested successfully in implementation of SWPBIS is in a strong position to expand the Tier I support practices/systems. The district already has the policies, operating procedures, funding models, and data systems to facilitate SWPBIS implementation. More importantly, the district has invested in establishing the local trainers and coaches needed to conduct the training locally, in smaller groups, and with less likelihood of a need for travel or extra expense. The net result is that adding a cluster of 30 new school teams implementing SWPBIS to the initial 15 pilot schools can be achieved at a cost of approximately \$3000 per school over the initial 2-year adoption window with \$400 per year per school for access to data applications.

Table 2: Scenario B Budget Model

Implementation Focus	Implementation Activities	Direct Transition Costs	New, On-going Direct Costs	Potential Opportunity Costs
30 School Teams with 5-7 individuals per team	Year 1: Three 1.5 day workshops Year 2: Two 1.5 day workshops	Training provided by District personnel Personnel time (substitutes): \$600 per school per training	Data System (\$400 per school per year)	Space (dedicated) Teams meets at least twice a month
Coaches/ Trainers (2 trainers per district/ 3 coaches: 1 per 5-7 schools)	Year 1: Three 0.5 day workshops Year 2: Two 0.5 day workshops	Existing District Coaches/ Trainers establish new coaches, and existing coaches assume support for additional schools		Coaches/ Trainers meet at least monthly Coaches/ Trainers re-tasked to work on PBIS.

Leadership Team	Monitor Scaling Effort, and monitor SWPBIS implementation fidelity and impact			Monthly meetings
Year 1 (15 teams)		\$54,000	\$6000	
Year 2 (15 teams)		\$36,000	\$6000	
Total		\$90,000	\$12,000	
Cost per school		\$3,000/ school	\$400/school/ year	

Scenario C: District Investing in 15 Tier I SWPBIS Schools Broadening Implementation to Include Tier II and Tier III Practices/Systems.

An underappreciated feature of SWPBIS is the strong commitment to building multiple tiers of support intensity. The vision is for organized teams that can respond to both academic and behavior support needs, but with a level of support intensity that matches the student’s needs, and shifts a student from an “at-risk” to an “adequate progress” trajectory. Projecting the costs that allow schools to add Tier II and Tier III supports to their successful use of Tier I SWPBIS is especially challenging. Districts with strong behavioral expertise in their school psychologist, counselors, social workers, administrators and special educators typically require less external training assistance. Many intervention packages exist (with varying costs) that allow improved efficiency of adoption (though it is always important to consider how a packaged program will be adapted to fit the unique features of the local context and culture).

It is not uncommon for districts to need additional external training support to move from Tier I to Tiers II and III. That training support would focus both on school teams and on district coaches/trainers. Examples of training content include:

1. Check-in Check-out
2. Bully prevention
3. Team-Initiated Problem Solving
4. Wrap around systems of support
5. Function-based Support (Assessment, Support Plan Development, Support Implementation)
6. Prevent-Teach-Reinforce
7. Interconnected Systems Framework (linking academic, behavioral, mental health supports)
8. First Step to Success

9. Steps to Respect

10. Social Skills Clubs

Each of these intervention options can be implemented with one to four days of training coupled with on-site coaching. Costs vary for purchase of materials, training expertise, staff time for team training, and related data systems, but can be estimated given (a) the assessment of local training capacity, (b) the scope (number of schools) and (c) the extent to which existing data systems are available to monitor both support fidelity and data specific to individual students.

Reference

- Blonigen, B., Harbaugh, W., Singell, L., Horner, R. H., Irvin, L. K., & Smolkowski, K. (2008). Application of Economic Analysis to School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) Programs. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 10(1), 5-19.
- Blonigen, B., Harbaugh, W., Singell, L., Horner, R. H., Irvin, L. K., & Smolkowski, K. (2008). Application of Economic Analysis to School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) Programs. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 10(1), 5-19.