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# **PROMOTING POSITIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACHES AND REDUCING RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION:**

## The American School for the Deaf's Model of Success

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# Promoting Positive Discipline Approaches and Reducing Restraint and Seclusion: The American School for the Deaf's Model of Success

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## Introduction

**T**his brief describes a school's transformation from using ineffective and punitive disciplinary practices to implementing effective and proactive responses to behavior by installing the PBIS framework in a unique setting. Specifically, this demonstration highlights the work of the PBIS school leadership team at the American School for the Deaf (ASD) and describes ASD's use of PBIS strategies in alignment with the Six Core Strategies© to reduce their use of restraint and seclusion.



## Background

“Students with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusionary and reactive discipline practices than students without disabilities” (Simonsen et al., 2020, p. 2). The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, (CRDC, 2020) estimates that 122,000 students (approximately 0.2% of all students enrolled) experienced a restraint or seclusion during the last data collection period (2017-2018). More specifically, approximately 80% of the students physically restrained and 77% of the students secluded were identified with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Despite that, students who receive special education make up only 13% of the entire student population (CRDC, 2020).

Not only is there a higher prevalence of crisis responses with students with disabilities, but also the use of restraint and seclusion can have negative outcomes. For example, reactionary crisis or emergency responses have led to serious, sometimes fatal, injuries to students (e.g., blunt trauma to the chest, aspiration; Mohr et al., 2003; Nunno et al., 2006). Students who experience restraint and seclusion might also have long-term psychological impacts (Dowell & Larwin, 2016). Additionally, adult staff might be injured when using restraint and seclusion, leading to increased costs for workers compensation (Chan et al., 2012). With such negative impacts, the use of restraint and seclusion as a response to problematic behaviors needs to be addressed and consideration for alternatives must be explored.



## PBIS and Restraint and Seclusion Reduction

When schools implement evidence-based practices within a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, research indicates that student outcomes improve (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2015; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). In particular, students reduce problematic behavior that may lead to restraint and seclusion responses (Horner & Sugai, 2009). Further, researchers have suggested that restraint and seclusion may be reduced with strategies that rely on a positive and preventive approach such as (a) providing training to staff in ways to prevent crisis (Ryan et al., 2007), (b) using PBIS with clear expectations and a matched reinforcement system (Fogt & Peripavel, 2002), and (c) reviewing data regularly (Simonsen et al., 2019; Trader et al., 2017). Initial school case studies using PBIS have reported reduced use of restraint and seclusion (George et al., 2013; Gelbar et al., 2015; Simonsen et al., 2010). As the Center on PBIS was interested in



continuing to explore the role of PBIS in preventing and reducing restraint and seclusion, we established a partnership with the American School for the Deaf (ASD)—a setting that implemented PBIS to reduce their use of restraint and seclusion.

### **American School for the Deaf**

ASD is a school that specializes in the education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students and has strived to be an “exemplary model educational program” with “trained and experienced educators of the deaf” (ASD, 2022). ASD’s Executive Director and an Executive Leadership Team oversee both a school and residential program. ASD enrolls students in grades preK-12 and up to age 21 from approximately two-thirds of the school districts

from Connecticut, with some students living more than 45 minutes away. Many ASD students receive special education managed by their Local Education

Agency (LEA), but attend this specialized school because their local schools were not as culturally or linguistically accessible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. For example, in a typical school setting, Deaf and Hard of Hearing students may rely on an interpreter

or support person to communicate and navigate the school context. If that person is unavailable, the student immediately loses access to educational and social opportunities. At ASD, the environments are accessible at all times. Despite this accessibility, some students at ASD engaged in significant challenging behavior and required targeted (Tier 2) or intensive (Tier 3) social, emotional, and behavioral support.

**“When students come to ASD, they are hungry for positivity [and] cultural and linguistic accessibility...when you introduce something that’s as clear-cut as PBIS, most students jump on board.”**

**“As hearing people, we sit around a table and learn through osmosis. We might be involved in one conversation, and hear a news story on a nearby TV or radio. Deaf children don’t have this advantage. Since approximately 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents who do not use American Sign Language (ASL), many of the nuances that hearing children acquire incidentally are not available to them. PBIS has increased the opportunities we have to explicitly teach social and behavioral expectations that others could not, due to the communication barriers.”**





## Shifting Thinking: A PBIS Approach for Discipline

Before PBIS at ASD, the students needing additional supports, particularly those who benefitted from the most resource intensive Tier 3 supports, were often on a point and level system that was punitive. ASD wanted to try a more positive approach to discipline and, in 2010 the school was invited to participate in a 3-year PBIS training opportunity through the technical assistance initiatives of the State Education Resource Center (SERC) of Connecticut. ASD has been using a PBIS framework since then and is currently working on consistently using Tier 2 (supplemental or targeted) and Tier 3 (intensive or individualized) supports and reviewing data to guide practice, with support from SERC Consultants.

### Connection to Center on PBIS

Throughout the years of support to ASD, SERC PBIS consultants fostered a close connection with the National TA Center on PBIS through on-going national, state, and regional systems of support (e.g., training, coaching, networking), and ASD benefitted from these connections (e.g., presenting at regional and national conferences). To build internal training and coaching capacity, ASD staff also participated in a regional (Northeast) PBIS Training of Trainers, facilitated by Center on PBIS partners. In the next sections, we describe how ASD implemented and adapted the PBIS framework to their school context.

### Initial Implementation

ASD pledged to establish PBIS by initially focusing on the development of a Tier 1 PBIS system that aligned with the culture, values and needs of their school.

First, a team was assembled from staff across every program on campus to help provide a cohesive approach across all settings. The school's

Executive Director was in support and committed to three years of training. The team disseminated a staff survey to assess buy-in that revealed an 85% staff commitment to PBIS. Although there was some initial staff reluctance to change the discipline approaches, the team was able to reach a 90% approval among both educational and residential staff due to increased encouragement from leadership. Then ASD began to establish tiered levels of support and core foundations to PBIS implementation, tailored to the ASD setting.

“It was a philosophical shift in thinking”

### What is PBIS?

PBIS is a multi-tiered prevention framework with data-driven problem-solving to make schools more effective and efficient in improving social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for all students. Most schools start by establishing a Tier 1 (universal or core) system that serves as the foundation for a social culture upon which Tier 2 (targeted) and Tier 3 (individual) systems are built (Center on PBIS, 2022).



Additionally, as part of the initial roll-out at the beginning of the 2011-2012 academic year, PBIS leaders made “passports” where stickers were added to sections of the passport when rotations of small student groups participated in behavioral expectation lessons for each specific location (see Figure 1). Members of the leadership team went to the specific locations and explicitly taught the skills in all school settings (e.g., cafeteria, classroom, gym).

**Get rid of self-fulfilling prophecies!  
To change [the] process, you need to  
change the culture.**

Other examples of the Tier 1 PBIS foundational supports are provided below.

#### **SHIFT POLICY TO PROMOTE POSITIVE APPROACH**

- Change the school handbook to reflect PBIS affirmative/positive language
- Utilize counselors with expertise in special education to review policies and guidance documents and adjust language to reflect PBIS/positive school climate

**I would recommend extensive training. You may not be able to do three years but even a year is essential. You continue to have a consultation resource, and every session helps iron out challenges. It has to be a planned process. I am disappointed when I hear people say that implementing PBIS is just about an assembly or tickets.**



Figure 1. Behavioral Expectation Sticker Passport

- Change names of staff positions to reflect the PBIS culture (e.g., Crisis Intervention Specialists became Student Support Coordinators)
- Develop therapeutic respite in response to student needs
- Align the PBIS framework with other educational and social emotional initiatives

#### **INCREASE FACULTY SUPPORT**

- Start with a survey to solicit level of buy-in
- Utilize staff who are PBIS supporters to encourage their peers to accept the PBIS framework



#### PROVIDE TRAINING/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON PBIS FOR STAFF

- Set up initial and on-going professional development
- Provide orientation on PBIS as part of the New Employee Orientation

#### UTILIZE PBIS TEAMS

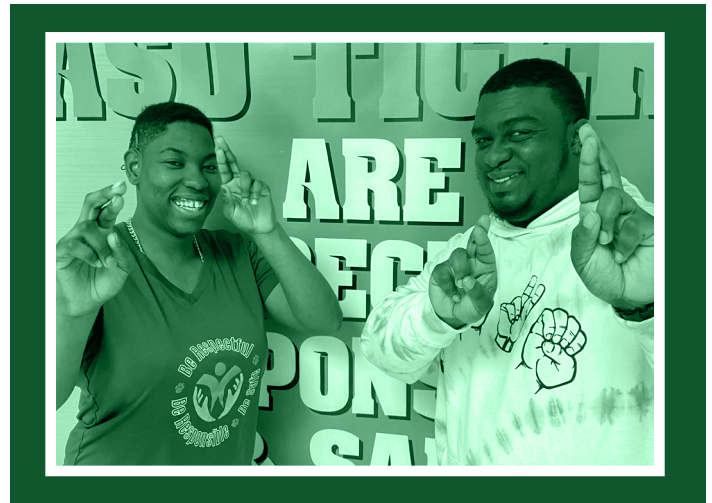
- Set up team that includes staff from all programs (educational, residential)
- Provide initial and on-going support for the teams from the school and residential administration, including the ASD Board of Directors

#### SELECT CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS

- Set up positively stated expectations for all settings (see Figure 2 and Table 1)
- Use American Sign Language (ASL) to teach expectations explicitly



Figure 2. School-wide Expectations



Signing the school-wide expectation "respectful"

#### TEACH LESSON PLANS ALIGNED WITH EXPECTATIONS

- Use lesson plans that teach what expectations look like across all settings (educational, residential)
- Implement the "teach, re-teach and redirect" intervention across all milieus

#### IMPLEMENT PBIS IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS

- Post the classroom matrix in the front and center of the classroom where students can see it and be prepared to learn when being taught from it
- Teach PBIS lessons in real time and in the actual classroom settings

#### ESTABLISH FEEDBACK/ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT SYSTEM

- Set up a schoolwide system of acknowledgement  
*Example: "Passports" for all students with stickers indicating the location and completion of the location lesson*
- Ask for student input on what they would like



*Signing the school-wide expectation "responsible"*

- Make individualized reinforcers available for all students

*Example: Student who demonstrated appropriate behavior in a challenging situation was able to earn a bike ride and lunch at the local park with preferred staff*

- Use real world consequences for behaviors which align with reparative practices

*Example: property damage such as damaging a bulletin board required repairing the damage (restitution)*

#### INVOLVE STUDENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

- Send SWIS data (with explanation of analysis) home with report cards quarterly
- Share copies of SWIS data with family, outside agencies, and school districts
- Develop PBIS take-home kits with templates and tickets connected to the PBIS framework and reinforcement systems

#### USE DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

- Use SWIS behavioral data to make data informed decisions
- Set up separate SWIS accounts for the residential treatment program and core educational program to ensure data fidelity for the separate settings
- Advocate for the SWIS system to allow for 24/7/365 data collection that addressed the specific needs of the residential setting
- Include compliance with PBIS implementation in staff performance evaluations

#### MONITOR FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Use a variety of tools (SET, TFI) to monitor implementation
- Use outside consultants for objective feedback
- Review data pre- and post- intervention

#### ADDRESS SPECIFIC AREAS AND CONCERNS

- Eliminate time-out rooms, "detention halls," and out-of-school suspensions
- Designate safe and comfortable areas (comfort rooms) for students to de-escalate

**“There was additional staff push-back when we started to talk about removing the time out rooms.**

**The reaction was, “what are we going to do?”**

***You are going to talk to them before it gets to that point.***





## What Does PBIS Look Like Across Different Locations at ASD?

Table 1. Behavioral Expectations Matrix by Location at ASD

PBIS by Location								
		Classrooms	Bathrooms	Cafeteria	Library	Residential Settings	Hallways	School Grounds
Be Respectful	Follow staff directions	Be patient	Flush	Be patient in line	Take care of the books you borrow	Help and support others	Pay attention to directions	Take care of the environment
	Raise your hand	Shut off water when finished	Say "please" and "thank you" to others	Follow librarian directions	Keep common areas clean	Use polite hands and voices	Hold the door for the person behind you	Be a good pedestrian
	Arrive on time	Put trash in cans	Polite hands and voices	Allow others to focus on their work	Follow directions from staff			Be patient
Be Responsible	Keep your area neat	Wash your hands	Clean up after yourself	Return your books on time	Keep room clean		Walk on the right side of the hall	Pick up trash
	Come prepared to learn	Practice good hygiene	Get everything you need before sitting	Put books and materials back where you found them	Complete dorm duties	Pick up trash		Carry your ID at all times
	Keep your hands and your feet to your own body	Report any issues to staff	Put trays and dishes in the proper place	Ask for help when you need it	Follow scheduled activities	Appreciate artwork and information on the walls		Keep your personal items with you
Be Safe	Follow rules for emergencies	Keep the water in the sink	Walk	Walk	Play nice	Walk		Stay on sidewalks and crosswalks
	If you see something, say something	Wipe up any spills	Keep floor clean and dry	Follow emergency procedures	Tell staff where you are going	Keep hands and feet to yourself		Look before crossing the street
		Clean up your mess	Report big spills	Keep hands to yourself	If you see something, say something	Follow emergency procedures		Listen to security

### Addressing Restraint and Seclusion

During the beginning stages of PBIS training hosted by the SERC, ASD was concerned about the overuse of restraint and seclusion. After the initial roll-out of PBIS practices, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) contacted the school because of a large number of students reported as being restrained and/or secluded. "They met with us and the tone was very powerful...our restraint and seclusion and 911 calls were off the charts. Staff thought, if

we don't fix this, we could lose our designation as a Residential Treatment Program." The PBIS leadership team reprioritized their efforts to focus explicitly on the reduction of restraint and seclusion use. The Director of Clinical Services began by aligning ASD's implementation of PBIS with the Six Core Strategies<sup>©</sup> guidelines to address restraint and seclusion in hospital-based settings.

**This was an example of working smarter, not harder!**

## The Six Core Strategies©

In 2010, the Child Welfare League of America, the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) initiated a grant program to establish best practices for behavior management that ultimately included an examination of seclusion and restraint (SAMSHA, 2010a). The project culminated in the development of a training curriculum centered on six practices called the, Six Core Strategies© consisting of (a) Leadership Toward Organizational Change, (b) The Use of Data to Inform Practice, (c) Workforce Development, (d) Use of Prevention Tools, (e) Supporting Consumer and Advocate Roles in Inpatient Settings, and (f) Debriefing Tools (SAMSHA, 2010a, p. 6). Evaluations and case studies of the Six Core Strategies© have demonstrated efficacy in reducing the use of restraint and seclusion (Azeem et al., 2015; SAMSHA, 2010b). The Six Core Strategies© has been used by in-patient hospitals and residential facilities as a way to address restraint and seclusion. In 2012, when the U.S. Department of Education issued guidelines on addressing restraint and seclusion in schools, they suggested the potential use of the

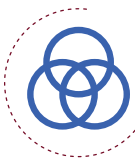


*Signing the school-wide expectation "safe"*

Six Core Strategies© within school settings. Similarly, when LeBel et al. (2012) reviewed the use of restraint and seclusion nationally, they proposed that schools adopt the Six Core Strategies© as one of the best practices for reducing the use of restraint and seclusion.

## Aligning the Six Core Strategies© and PBIS

With the blend of settings at ASD and the promise of both the Six Core Strategies© and PBIS implementation, the PBIS leadership saw a natural fit and worked to align the Six Core Strategies© within the PBIS framework. See Table 2 for a summary of the alignment.



**Table 2. Alignment of the Six Core Strategies© with the PBIS framework**

Strategies	Activities
Strategy One: Leadership Towards Organizational Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adopt PBIS and a preventive approach to school discipline</li><li>• Achieve 100% buy-in from Executive Director and the ASD Board of Directors</li><li>• Develop a budget to ensure initiatives are funded</li></ul>
Strategy Two: Using Data to Inform Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use SWIS to track data by location, day of the week, average referrals/day/month, motivation, time, staff, and problem behavior 24 hours a day, 365 days per year</li><li>• Review data regularly to identify areas of concern</li><li>• Develop interventions to address “red flags”, and do pre- and post-data reviews</li></ul>
Strategy Three: Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with the SERC for ongoing PBIS professional development for all staff</li><li>• Provide “mini” PBIS data reviews and workshops at teacher and support staff meetings</li><li>• Infuse paperwork templates, such as Incident Reports and Treatment Plans with Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence (ABC) with areas of focus</li></ul>
Strategy Four: Use of Prevention Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adopt a PBIS framework and set expectations for each location (respectful, responsible and safe behavior)</li><li>• Set up sensory and comfort rooms</li><li>• Provide sensory and mental health supports in both the educational and residential milieus to support de-escalation and promote self-regulation</li></ul>
Strategy Five: Supporting Consumer Roles in Inpatient Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorporate student and stakeholder voice into the PBIS framework</li><li>• Example: “Menus” of choices developed by the students</li><li>• Include students in the development of a positive, visual PBIS milieu (bulletin boards, short, positive videos to be promoted schoolwide)</li><li>• Develop a PBIS Student Advisory Committee</li><li>• Develop Student Learning Objectives (SLO's) based on data, and do in-milieu data review and interventions with students, getting their ideas about solutions to areas of concern</li></ul>
Strategy Six: Debriefing Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a debriefing process that ties with the PBIS framework focusing on Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence (ABC's)</li><li>• Data analysis using SWIS</li><li>• Use debriefing form for restraint and seclusion with a questionnaire that focuses on prevention</li><li>• Include staff in reviewing incidents involving restraint and seclusion</li><li>• Invite student to review the incident when they are ready</li><li>• Notify family of incident as soon as it is safe to do so</li><li>• Share incident report within 12 hours to the Department of Children and Families, the State Department of Education, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, and the Local Education Agency</li></ul>

**“We have had ups and downs like everyone else.  
Data-based decisions help us identify areas of concern.”**



## Outcomes

In summary, when the adults began to use interventions that were less “threatening” and incorporated the PBIS language, such as the school-wide expectations, the students started to respond, and their positive behaviors increased. This transformation, albeit slow and methodical, led to a reduction of office discipline referrals. The process also helped move students and adults away from focusing on negative consequences (i.e., losing points) and reframed the emphasis on opportunities to earn preferred reinforcers that were within reach. Adults learned that building relationships with the students prevented many problem behaviors. If challenges did occur, responding in a positive manner was more efficient and effective for de-escalation.

As a result of implementation, **from 2012-2020, there was an 82% decrease in restraints and 99%**

“Very evident that school-based PBIS helps reduce restraint and seclusion. It really works!”

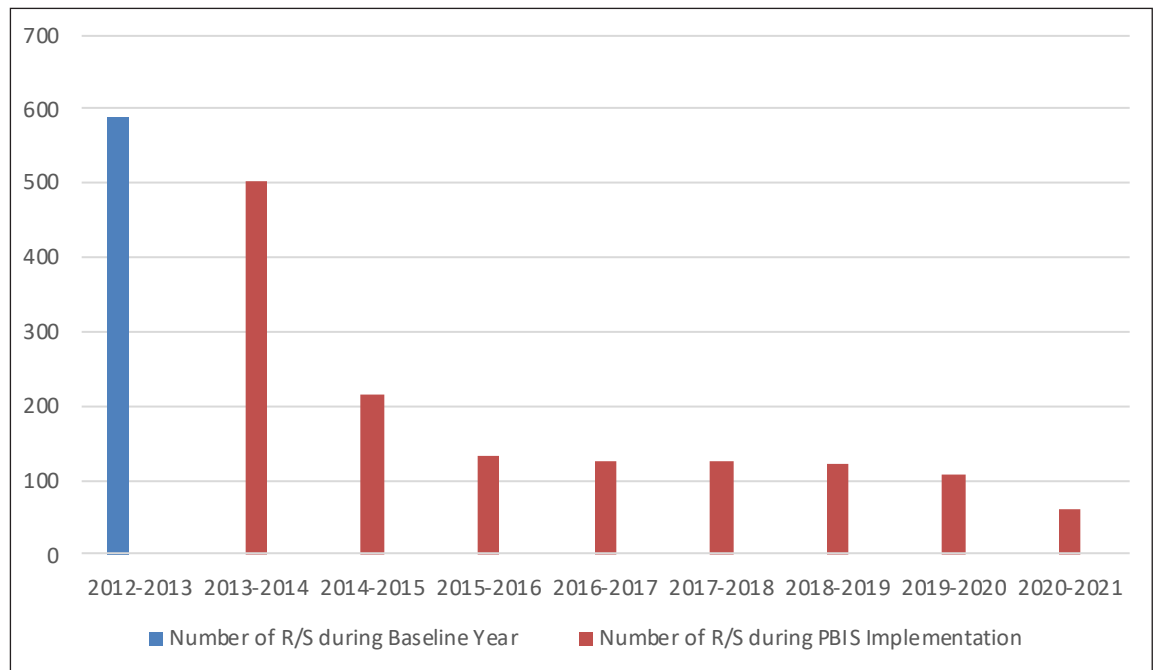
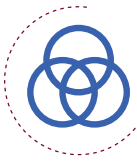


Figure 3. Restraint and Seclusion Data Used at ASD (2012-2021)

**reduction in seclusions from baseline (i.e., pre-PBIS implementation).** Further, these campus-wide reductions have sustained across several school years. Workman’s compensation claims have been reduced so much that the insurance company wanted to learn about PBIS strategies. If restraint is ever used, it is only for self-injurious behavior. Figure 3 displays the impact across years.



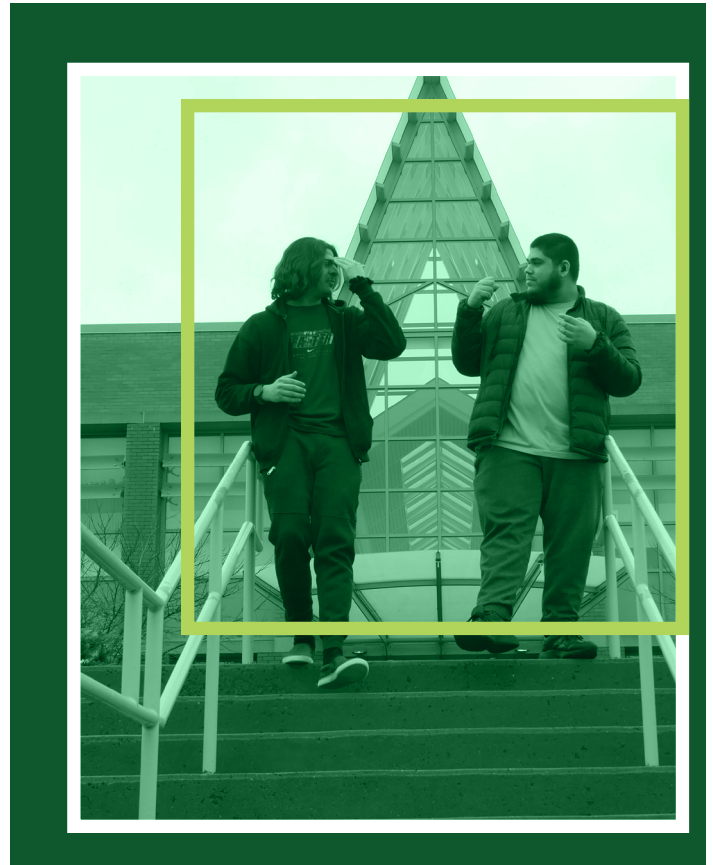


## Current Status

Members of the team report that PBIS is actively part of the school culture. The PBIS framework is embedded into their Strategic Plan, approved by the ASD Board of Directors, and has on-going support of the Executive Leadership Team with a budget dedicated to campus-wide PBIS initiatives.

## Conclusion

ASD and its PBIS team have successfully changed the culture at their school to adopt a preventive PBIS approach. This has led to increases in contextually appropriate behaviors and decreases in contextually inappropriate behaviors for both the students and the adults at ASD. For effectiveness and efficiency, **ASD notably aligned the Six Core Strategies© with the PBIS framework and has seen a decrease in the use of restraint and seclusion across time.** This model demonstration brief shares the positive effects of the National Center on PBIS supporting state-level PBIS trainers, and the state-level trainers supporting the school leadership team at the American School for the Deaf (ASD) to address its overuse of restraint and seclusion and establish a safe and positive environment for its population of students with disabilities.



“First, you need a strong foundation with Tier 1. It has to be strong. Two, you can’t pick and choose parts of PBIS. You need to use it as an entire framework and let the data drive the decisions.”



## Additional Resources

1. Preventing Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (May, 2019)  
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/preventing-restraint-and-seclusion-in-schools>
2. Preventing Seclusion & Restraint (Oct, 2020)  
<https://www.pbis.org/video/session-b7-pbis-forum-2020-preventing-seclusion-restraint>
3. Supporting Students with Disabilities at School and Home:  
A Guide for Teachers to Support Families and Students (2020)  
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-students-with-disabilities-at-school-and-home-a-guide-for-teachers-to-support-families-and-students>
4. Supporting Students with Disabilities in the Classroom within a PBIS Framework (2020)  
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-students-with-disabilities-in-the-classroom-within-a-pbis-framework>
5. Returning to School: Considerations for Students With the Most Intensive Behavioral Needs, A Guide to Supporting Students With Disabilities, Their Families, and Educators (2021)  
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/returning-to-school-considerations-for-students-with-the-most-intensive-behavioral-needs-a-guide-to-supporting-students-with-disabilities-their-families-and-educators-during-the-2020-21-school-year>
6. Restraint and Seclusion Alternatives in All U.S. States and Territories:  
A Review of Legislation and Policies (2021)  
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/restraint-and-seclusion-alternatives-in-all-us-states-and-territories-a-review-of-legislation-and-policies>
7. How Many States Reference SWPBS in their Restraint-Seclusion Policies? (2010)  
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/how-many-states-reference-swpbs-in-their-restraint-seclusion-policies>

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