

Implementing Evidence-Based Programs in School Settings

Welcome

Welcome to this module, Implementing Evidence-Based Programs in School Settings. This is the third in a three-module series about evidence-based programs.

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Credits

The authors of Implementing Evidence-Based Programs in School Settings are Allison Dymnicki, Ph.D., Kimberly D. Becker, Ph.D., Dana L. Cunningham, Ph.D., and Kellie L. Anderson, M.P.H.

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Modules in This Series

The modules in this series are as follows:

Module 1: Selecting Evidence-Based Programs for School Settings, which covers using data to inform evidence-based program (EBP) selection, engaging stakeholders, assessing and building readiness, and reviewing and selecting EBPs.

Module 2: Preparing to Implement Evidence-Based Programs in School Settings, which covers creating an implementation plan and team, understanding fidelity and adaptations, building staff and organizational competencies, and scheduling implementation.

Module 3: Implementing Evidence-Based Programs in School Settings, which covers executing implementation, collecting data and monitoring progress, overcoming barriers and challenges, and planning for sustainability.

Introduction: Selecting Evidence-Based Programs for School Settings

This module offers strategies and tools for implementing, evaluating, supporting, and sustaining evidence-based programs—referred to as EBPs—in school settings.

Module 1 in this series discussed how to select EBPs to address the needs of your population of focus. Module 2 focused on preparing to implement the EBPs that you have chosen in your school. If you haven't already viewed Modules 1 and 2, we strongly recommend that you do so before beginning this module.

Overview of This Module

In this module, we discuss:

- Implementing the EBP in two phases: initial and full implementation
- Monitoring the fidelity of implementation
- Using data to assess both short- and long-term progress toward achieving your anticipated outcomes
- Developing a plan to provide ongoing support to EBP implementers
- Anticipating and overcoming challenges and barriers to implementation
- Sustaining the elements of the EBP that are having the desired effects

Case Example: The Alton (Illinois) School District's Experience Implementing EBPs

In this module, we will once again hear from Sandy Crawford, the former project director of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative for the Alton School District in Alton, Illinois. Sandy will describe how Alton middle schools implemented, monitored, and worked to sustain two EBPs: Project Alert and LifeSkills.

The EBP Implementation Process

The National Implementation Research Network defines implementation as a “specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program.” Just as with selecting and preparing to implement EBPs, implementing EBPs requires a data-informed process to ensure that your EBP will achieve the intended outcomes in your population of focus.

Perhaps your school has implemented EBPs in the past but the results were disappointing. Even the best EBP will fail if it is not addressing current needs or being implemented as intended. Thoughtful planning, strong leadership, and staff support increase the chances of successful implementation.

It is important to realize that implementing EBPs is a process and **not** an event. You may decide to roll out specific components of the EBP over time. Making adjustments to implementation and adapting the EBP along the way help to maximize the impact of an EBP.

Remember: Effective EBPs plus effective implementation practices equals improved student outcomes.

Initial Implementation

When you are ready for implementation, your first step is initial implementation. During initial implementation, you begin to implement the EBP, but you might do it with just a few volunteers, with one grade, or in one location in the school (such as in hallways or the cafeteria).

- **Practice implementation.** Initial implementation is your practice run. It is the first time staff will try out new practices, allowing you to assess if staff have been adequately trained.
- **Pilot test adaptations.** You can also pilot test adaptations that you have made to the EBP to see if they are working and if additional adaptations need to be made.
- **Discuss challenges.** During initial implementation, your EBP Implementation Team, coaches, and mentors can discuss challenges with staff, such as fear of change, managing new processes, and components of the EBP staff think are not working.
- **Build momentum.** As you move toward full implementation, the team can also work to build momentum and enthusiasm among staff by providing positive highlights about initial implementation and publicly recognizing the efforts of staff.
- **Assess systems.** You can also use this time to assess systems factors that contribute to implementation challenges. Questions to ask include:
 - Do staff have enough time to implement the EBP?
 - Do staff have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to problem solve and discuss challenges?
 - Is leadership communicating the value and importance of the EBP and how it connects to other schoolwide goals?

- **Develop strategies for addressing barriers and communicating progress.** During initial implementation, your EBP Implementation Team should develop strategies for identifying and overcoming implementation barriers, and sharing progress with key stakeholders throughout the implementation process.

Full Implementation

After initial implementation, when you have made necessary adjustments and built momentum, you are ready for full implementation of your EBP. All your planning, preparation, and practice have led you here!

- **Fully integrate the EBP.** Full implementation is when the EBP is completely integrated into your school’s policies, procedures, and practices.
- **Begin process evaluation and fidelity assessment.** Careful monitoring, through process evaluation and fidelity assessment, is imperative during full implementation, so you can determine if the program is being implemented as intended.
- **Start outcome evaluation.** Additionally, this is when you will begin collecting data to evaluate if you are on the right path to achieving your intended outcomes.
- **Make adaptations.** You may decide at this stage that you need to make careful adaptations to a given EBP to improve implementation. Adaptations should be made in partnership with staff who are implementing the EBP and in consultation with the EBP developers and other sites that have implemented the EBP.
- **Determine where more support is needed.** During full implementation, you may also see areas where you need additional staff, training, support, funding, or materials.

Case Example: The Alton (Illinois) School District’s Experience Staggering Implementation

Next, Sandy Crawford will describe how her school district implemented Project Alert one year, and then LifeSkills the following year:

“We trained all of our health teachers and our school resource officer in the summer before the start of that first year. And then it was implemented that year with the sixth grade. That population of sixth graders the second year then moved to the LifeSkills curriculum and those teachers, the training took place the summer before the second year. So we ensure that that population—that cohort—that started in sixth grade received curriculum all three years during the middle school.

“When you have multiple initiatives going on at the same time it is important to have an implementation schedule because we—and that was part of why we elected to kind of stagger the implementation and get Project Alert trained and on board the first year while the prevention agency was still doing some of the LifeSkills demonstration in year one. And then shift to the training for LifeSkills in the second year. I think to have done them both in the same year would probably have been an overload on teachers and we had to be really, really cognizant of just the multiple initiative overload that can sometimes happen when there are other restraints as well—other demands on them with other curricula, other programming.”

Fidelity

Let’s now discuss the importance of monitoring fidelity during EBP implementation.

As we discussed in Module 2, fidelity is the extent to which an EBP is implemented the way it was designed by the EBP developer. If you do not implement an EBP with fidelity, you decrease the chances of achieving meaningful outcomes.

Multiple research studies have found that programs that monitor fidelity generally have better outcomes than programs that do not.

Monitor Fidelity

Because fidelity often decreases over time, monitoring fidelity is an ongoing task. Monitoring fidelity requires that you:

- **Track implementation of core elements.** Regularly track the extent to which the core components of the EBP are being implemented.
- **Monitor adaptations.** Track any adaptations you make to the EBP to ensure that they are not compromising fidelity.
- **Use existing fidelity-monitoring tools.** Use the fidelity-monitoring tools from the EBP developer if they are available and if they are appropriate for your school setting.
- **Address and overcome implementation barriers.** Address low fidelity by working with stakeholders, the Implementation Team, and staff who are implementing the EBP to create strategies that address barriers to implementation.

For more information on these issues, please see the fidelity section of the Resources slide at the end of this module.

Assess Fidelity and Adaptations

As with other data collection activities, you will want to collect **both** quantitative and qualitative data to assess fidelity, and also to ensure that any adaptations to the EBP are not compromising fidelity.

- A **quantitative approach to assess implementation fidelity**, for example, would be conducting a survey that asks teachers to report on which EBP components they use and how often.
- A **qualitative approach to assess implementation fidelity** would be conducting focus groups with students, asking them to describe the EBP components they have received, and to describe how and when the teacher delivers the EBP. Taken together, these data provide information about the extent to which the EBP is being implemented in the way that it was intended to be delivered.
- A **quantitative approach to assess adaptations** would be conducting a survey that asks teachers to rate the feasibility and effectiveness of EBP adaptations being implemented and to rate the extent to which each adaptation addresses program outcomes and objectives.
- A **qualitative approach to assess adaptations** would be conducting classroom observations of staff members who are implementing adaptations to assess the effectiveness of adaptations, teachers' comfort implementing adaptations, and students' receptivity to adaptations.

Case Example: The Alton (Illinois) School District's Experience Monitoring Fidelity

Sandy will now describe how Alton monitored fidelity throughout implementation of Project Alert and LifeSkills:

"The fidelity was monitored through the checklists that come with both of the programs. And it was addressed through the monthly health department meetings with the assistant principal. Our evaluator was able to meet with the assistant principal to, to really make clear the need for fidelity and adhering to that throughout the term of the grant."

"We really didn't have issues with fidelity because so much time spent in planning upfront ensured that the number of lessons was adequate, that it would fit within the constraints that those health teachers had, the time that they had the students. So I think the, the planning upfront really paid off on that."

Collect Data to Monitor Progress

In addition to monitoring fidelity and adaptations, as soon as you begin implementing an EBP you will need to collect data to assess progress toward achieving your intended short- and long-term outcomes:

- **Identify outcomes at multiple levels.** Measure progress toward reaching outcomes at the individual, school, and district levels. These should be the outcomes you specified when you developed your logic model as we discussed in Module 2.
- **Compile and collect data for each outcome.** Use the data sources and measures you have identified to compile and collect data for each of your outcomes.
- **Compare with benchmarks.** Compare your data with the benchmarks you identified in Module 1.
- **Determine validity, reliability, and sensitivity.** Determine if your data collection measures are valid, reliable, and sensitive to change.
 - **Validity** is an indication of how well an instrument measures what it is truly supposed to measure.
 - **Reliability** is an estimation of the consistency or repeatability of a measurement. It reflects the degree to which an instrument or scale measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same subjects.
 - **Sensitivity** or responsiveness to change is an important attribute of any scale. It must be able to detect small, but clinically significant changes in an outcome over time.
- **Discuss data collection procedures and responsibilities.** If you have not done so already, decide who will collect the data, how often these data will be collected, and what methods will be used to collect the data. For instance, will you use an online survey or focus groups? Will you collect data quarterly or bi-annually?

Remember that many EBPs come with measurement and assessment tools to help you track progress. Make sure you include a mix of quantitative data (such as surveys) and qualitative data (such as interviews) with a range of stakeholders (including students, staff, families, and community members) to incorporate multiple perspectives.

Assess Progress Toward Achieving Goals

You should also assess progress toward achieving your long-range goals:

- **Monitor short- AND long-term goals.** It is important to remember that widespread change can take a long time, so include measures for short-term outcomes as a way to determine if you are making progress in meeting long-term goals. For example, you can measure if rates of unexcused absences are declining to help you determine if you are on track to meet the long-term goal of increasing graduation rates.
- **Analyze findings.** Just as you should collect multiple kinds of data, you should also analyze the data in a range of ways. For example, you could look at rates of unexcused absences by grade level or by different subgroups within your school (for instance, student athletes). If possible, use data from multiple sources and weigh evidence that is based on multiple sources—such as staff AND student reports—more heavily than evidence that is based on only one source.
- **Share and process findings as a group.** Share findings from your analysis regularly (such as quarterly) with students, staff, families, and other key stakeholders. Give people time to process and discuss the findings; some of the data may surprise them or may not resonate with their personal experiences. Engage stakeholders in discussions to understand what the findings mean to them.
- **Discuss progress or challenges to making progress.** Use the data to summarize your school’s progress—or challenges to making progress—toward short- and long-term goals during a certain time period. Do the data indicate changes on outcomes for certain subgroups (such as students with disabilities)? Do the data show certain teachers are making more progress than others? Do the data suggest that staff need more training on a specific content area?
- **Engage in continuous quality improvement (CQI).** Finally, on an ongoing basis, use your findings to reflect on and make modifications to the EBP, in consultation with the EBP developer. Or, make changes to related policies and procedures, as needed, to improve outcomes. This is called engaging in “continuous quality improvement” or CQI.

For more information on publicly available and no-cost measures and tools, please review the assessment resources in the Resources section at the end of this module. The EBP developer and other sites can also provide guidance.

Provide Support

Now let's move on to how to provide ongoing support during EBP implementation. Remember, implementation is a process, not an event. Once you implement your EBP, you must continue to support implementers, helping them learn and practice new skills, overcome challenges, and celebrate successes.

In the next few minutes, we will discuss the importance of ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring during implementation. We will also help you plan ahead for staff mobility, review strategies for confronting implementation obstacles, and discuss ways to celebrate successes.

Ongoing EBP Training

As we discussed in Module 2, training helps staff gain the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities to carry out implementation effectively. EBP training sessions also teach staff how, when, where, and why to use new skills and practices.

Ongoing training throughout EBP implementation can provide opportunities for staff to build relationships with their colleagues. This can help foster a sense of joint purpose among staff, and also allows them to collectively problem solve and share implementation challenges and successes.

You should also create opportunities for staff to receive booster sessions (which will be discussed in greater detail later) and advanced training. Advanced training may include train-the-trainer sessions, if your EBP allows, which can prepare staff to teach others how to implement the EBP. Train-the-trainer sessions can build the capacity of your school to provide staff training in the future, thereby enhancing EBP sustainability.

Ongoing Training Considerations

Just as with initial training sessions, you want to ensure during ongoing training that implementers feel confident practicing their new skills.

- **Prepare and practice.** Are the implementers adequately prepared? Make sure they have opportunities during training sessions to practice new skills and receive feedback.
- **Communicate.** How will implementers communicate with the trainers after the training, when questions or obstacles emerge?
- **Identify ongoing needs.** How will the ongoing needs of implementers be identified and addressed?

Booster Sessions

Booster sessions are another important support for implementers. Booster sessions can help build and reinforce competencies and skills to deliver the EBP, especially when new challenges to implementation emerge. These sessions can also provide another opportunity for staff to solve problems collaboratively. For example, one staff member can share how he or she successfully implemented a practice that another staff member is struggling with.

Coaching and Mentoring

While training and booster sessions are essential for building staff skills and competencies, they alone are not enough to help staff effectively implement an EBP over the long term. Ongoing staff coaching and mentoring is often required to realize meaningful change.

Coaching and mentoring have many benefits. They can:

- Provide real-time feedback and support to implementers
- Minimize resistance to implementation by providing staff with a place to discuss challenges and concerns
- Increase positive perceptions of the EBP among staff by having coaches and mentors acknowledge improved practices or short-term goals that staff have achieved along the way
- Manage expectations and help staff understand that creating long-term change takes time
- Help to develop and refine implementers' skills

Plan for Staff Mobility

You will also need to have a plan in place for continuing implementation when staff leave. It is critical to plan for staff mobility, so you can get new staff up-to-speed on implementation fairly quickly. Your plan should address:

- Who will take over implementation duties when staff leave?
- How will the time, space, and funds for training, coaching, and mentoring be supplied?

- When and how will new staff be trained? When choosing an EBP, consider one that allows train-the-trainer so that implementers who have completed train-the-trainer sessions can in turn train new staff.

Anticipate Challenges

Even with all of these supports in place, it is inevitable that challenges will arise during implementation. You can mitigate the negative effects of challenges and barriers if you anticipate and plan for them.

Here are some challenges that may arise during implementation:

- **Implementers' lack of confidence**, in which staff do not feel confident with part or all of what they are required to do for EBP implementation
- **Program characteristics, philosophies, or principles** that do not mesh well with existing systems, policies, and schedules
- **Limited staff motivation and support** to implement an EBP. For example, staff members may feel that it is not their responsibility to implement an EBP to prevent school violence.
- **Organizational processes and systems factors**, such as staffing and leadership issues

Overcome Challenges

Once you recognize challenges to implementation, you can work to circumvent or address them.

- You can improve **confidence issues** among implementers by conducting training (both initial training and booster sessions), providing coaching and mentoring, and enabling staff to come together to problem solve and share best practices.
- You can overcome challenges related to **program characteristics and staff motivation** by having staff try out new activities before full implementation with support from coaches and mentors. This can build staff confidence to implement the EBP and help them to see how the EBP fits into their existing curriculum. Discussions among the staff implementing the program can also be valuable. You may also be able to adapt an EBP to make it a better fit for your school, staff, and population of focus.

- Finally, you can enhance **organizational processes** that support the EBP. Consider enlisting EBP champions; employing shared decision-making and responsibility for program implementation; scheduling specific times and days for implementation; and increasing administrative and leadership support. For example, school leadership can ensure that substitute teachers are available to cover classes so staff can attend booster sessions. Leaders can also create common planning time for staff so they can meet regularly to problem solve implementation challenges.

Change Takes Practice and Time

It is important for implementers, the Implementation Team, school leaders, and stakeholders to understand that implementing a new EBP with fidelity takes practice and time.

- Do not expect implementers to instantly feel comfortable using their new skills, and do not expect change to happen overnight.
- Promote realistic expectations and take the time to celebrate small accomplishments and milestones achieved along the way.
- Finally, be sure to communicate successes to all of your stakeholders so you have their ongoing support throughout the implementation process.

Sustain the EBP

Finally, think about how your school and community partners will sustain the EBP after your current funding ends.

- **Plan early.** If your EBP is helping to achieve your intended outcomes, you will need a plan for maintaining core EBP components.
- **Institutionalize core components into routine practices.** Institutionalize practices in school practices and policies.
- **Consider:**
 - Does the EBP come with **free or low-cost supports and tools** that you can continue to use after your funding ends?
 - Are there **other funding sources** that can support the EBP?
 - Can all or part of the EBP become **institutionalized** in your school or district?

- If you cannot sustain an EBP in its current form, can you **sustain one or more core components** that data show are having a positive effect on your population of focus?
- Are there **community partners** who can deliver parts of the EBP, either within or outside of the school?
- Can you **reallocate resources** to support an EBP? Perhaps you could stop implementing existing programs that are not having their desired impact, thereby freeing up those resources to support the EBP.

You may want to contact the EBP developer and other sites that have implemented the EBP to discuss sustainability issues.

Case Example: The Alton (Illinois) School District’s Experience Sustaining EBPs

Let’s conclude by having Sandy describe how Alton planned for sustainability and found support for key components of their EBPs.

“I think, Safe Schools/Healthy Students—one of their hallmarks was the emphasis on sustainability early. And, you know, even hearing about it in year one was important because it got me to think about—beyond the grant, beyond the funding, you know, what will be able to sustain? And I think that was one of the positive features, particularly for Project Alert because of the cost and the online support that continued, really, at no cost to the district. So that’s a program that is easy to sustain.

“And the fact that we had community partners engaged as well, I think, is a plus for sustainability. The LifeSkills program has a parent component, and we were able to use one of the staff members at our local YWCA who had done some similar parenting programs, who was able to be the leader for a LifeSkills parent program. So just having those community supports lends itself to sustainability as well.”

Resources

Fidelity Resources

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP), available at the following website: <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/>
- The Institute of Education Sciences’ What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), available at the following website: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Assessment Resources

- American Institutes for Research: Safe Support Learning’s compendia of tools for assessing school climate, bullying, and student engagement, available at the following webpage: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>
- University of Maryland Center for School Mental Health free assessment list of publicly available and no-cost measures, available at the following webpage: <https://csmh.umaryland.edu/Resources/Resources-for-Clinicians/#d.en.104287>

Validity, Reliability, and Sensitivity Resources

- Barbour R. (2001). Checklists for improving the rigour in qualitative research: A case of the tail wagging the dog? *British Medical Journal*. 322:1115-1117. 11.
- Litwin, M.S. (1995). *How to measure survey reliability and validity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton M. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

General Implementation Resources

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service: Office of the Assistance Secretary for Planning and Evaluation’s brief *Using Evidence-Based Constructs to Assess Extent of Implementation of Evidence-Based Interventions*, available at the following webpage: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/using-evidence-based-constructs-assess-extent-implementation-evidence-based-interventions>
- The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), available at the following website: <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/>

Congratulations!

Congratulations! You have reached the end of this series on implementing EPBs in school settings. You have learned how to use a data-informed approach to select EBPs in partnership with key stakeholders; how to create the supports and competencies needed to prepare to implement EBPs; and how to implement, evaluate, support, and sustain EBPs in your school.

As a result, you have the strategies and tools you need to choose EBPs that are the right fit for your school, ensure that implementers have the skills and confidence needed to implement EBPs with fidelity, and maximize the chances that your EBPs will have a positive impact on your population of focus.