

POLICY BRIEF

PBIS/RP in L.A. Unified: Bright Spots and Challenges

Survey data shows most teachers and school site administrators support positive behavior interventions and supports and restorative practices (PBIS/RP). However, to address staff's needs and frustrations and foster welcoming, safe and inclusive school climates, renewed implementation efforts are needed. Recommendations include enhancing professional development, increasing Systems of Support Advisors support, and clear expectations from the top.

What's at stake

All students and staff benefit from safe and inclusive learning environments. To foster such environments, the District uses proactive, evidence-based approaches to discipline—positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and restorative practices (RP), the former introduced following the 2003 Consent Decree and the latter through the 2013 School Climate Bill of Rights. In 2004-05, 120,000 instructional days were lost to suspensions, but by 2023-24, just over 4,000 days were lost—a 97% reduction.

However, fights on campuses have increased each year since 2017-18, and racial and disability-related disparities in discipline remain. The most recent school experience survey also revealed continued declines in students' favorable views of school climate.

This brief summarizes findings from a survey of school site administrators and teachers given fall 2023 and provides insights and considerations for regional staff managing and supporting the District's discipline policy.

Research approach

In October 2023, the IAU surveyed school site administrators and teachers about their attitudes towards PBIS/RP and its implementation. Participants were randomly selected based on experience, school level, and other factors, and only those in the same role at the same school for two years could participate. A representative sample of 189 school site administrators and 591 teachers responded, with response rates of 30% and 16%.

About the IAU's Survey

In May 2023, the Board authorized its Independent Analysis Unit (IAU) to evaluate PBIS/RP implementation. This brief presents findings from a survey of school site administrators and teachers given early fall 2023.

Results

Most staff supported restorative practices, but not without frustrations, and few teachers used these strategies regularly. Time and limited training were the most-cited challenges.

Bright spots

The following factors were associated with greater support, proficiency, and use:

- SOSA support
- school site support
- professional development
- elementary schools

Lessons for region administrators and regional directors

Teachers and school site administrators need clear expectations from the top, and amid competing demands, SOSAs are pivotal staff to bolster implementation. Ongoing training is also essential to sustain implementation, and emphasis on low effort, Tier I strategies may foster greater support and use.

Access the full report [here](#) or via this QR code



Results

Most school site administrators and teachers supported restorative practices, but many expressed frustrations. While 83% of school site administrators and 54% of teachers were supportive of and confident in using restorative practices, staff had mixed feelings about how students felt about them. Still, even teachers who were supportive were frustrated, one saying: *“This only works if there is top-down support... [helping with] not just trainings but [demonstrating].”*

Despite general support, few teachers used these strategies regularly. Among teachers, only 30% regularly implemented restorative practices for prevention, and 43% used them frequently (half the time or more) for office discipline referrals (ODRs). Among school site administrators, however, 73% reported using restorative practices to respond to most (over half) of the ODRs they saw. Over half of school site administrators reported few teachers used restorative practices consistently.

Most teachers and school site administrators cited lack of time as a challenge. Over 60% of school site administrators and 50% of teachers selected time constraints as a challenge to implementing both PBIS and RPs. As one administrator put it: *“With all the other duties plus the sporadic incidents that occur, not much time is available to properly implement SWPBIS.”*

Both school site administrators and teachers reported insufficient training. Over 60% of school site administrators and 40% of teachers found limited training a major challenge in implementing PBIS/RP. Only 25% of teachers attended professional development related to these practices during or before the 2022-23 school year, and just 26% of teachers felt proficient in PBIS (27% in RPs). Finally, only 33% of school site administrators reported most of their teachers were trained in RPs.

Data suggests resistance from employees who were already employed when these practices became official policy. Data showed employees who were in their roles before 2013 were less supportive, confident, and skilled in restorative practices in 2022-23 than those who started after the 2013 policy change. As one respondent shared: *“I believe the training we have received is sufficient. The issue is some staff will always hem and haw and not see the need to change their old ways.”*

What works to support implementation?

SOSAs

SOSAs positively impact teachers' confidence and use of PBIS/RP.

- Teachers who interacted with a System of Support Advisor (SOSA) had higher confidence, more positive views of student attitudes, and more frequent use of PBIS/RP for prevention and responding to discipline issues. They also reported greater proficiency in PBIS/RP.

School Support

Support from school leadership improves teachers' attitudes.

- Teachers who felt supported by their school leadership had higher buy-in, confidence, and better perceptions of student attitudes towards RPs. They also reported greater proficiency in PBIS/RP.

PD

PD enhances teachers' buy-in, use of, and proficiency in PBIS/RP.

- Attendees of PD on PBIS/RP in 2022-23 were more supportive, proficient, and reported more frequent use of PBIS/RP, compared to those who did not attend PD. School site administrators also reported improved teacher and student support with high levels of teacher training.

Elementary**Data suggests elementary schools have stronger implementation.**

- Elementary school staff had higher buy-in and more positive perceptions of student attitudes compared to secondary school staff. They also used PBIS/RP more often.

Lessons for regional directors and administrators

Teachers and school site administrators need clear expectations from the top.

- Numerous staff mentioned competing demands regarding PD and planning.
- Moreover, misconceptions—for example *“that restorative practices mean that there are no consequences for serious discipline issues”*—were common.

Amid competing demands, SOSAs are pivotal staff to bolster implementation.

- As one school leader shared: *“Currently we get 5h a month. We need at least 5h a week...PBIS should be a top priority, but usually is the bottom priority.”*
- Central supports can accelerate PBIS/RP implementation by increasing funding to hire 30-35 more SOSAs in 2025-26.

School site administrators are key, but they need support and accountability, especially in secondary schools.

- As one teacher stated, *“admins go through the motion of giving information...but too abstract to follow.”*
- Other teachers expressed frustrations with the lack accountability: *“Staff at my site are willing to support the program, but administration does not commit...they mention it but no follow up.”*

Ongoing, scaffolded training is essential to sustain implementation.

- Mandatory training in 2024-25 as part of the Every School Safe Blueprint for Safety presents an opportunity to build a long-term plan for training for all school-based staff.
- As one teacher shared: *“I need a ‘refresher course... we have many new teachers at my school who have had no PDs on RP.”*

Emphasis on practices that require the least effort to implement may foster greater support and use.

- In line with existing research, the IAU recommends prioritizing minimal effort strategies (e.g., Tier 1) to promote buy-in.
- Finally, to achieve greater coherence and minimize the burden on staff, the IAU recommends integrating strategies with existing initiatives (e.g., the new District SEL goal roll-out in 2024-25).

This brief presents findings and policy lessons from a report the IAU gave to Board of Education on June 27, 2024, titled: [“Ten Years of the School Climate Bill of Rights in L.A. Unified: Where are we? Survey of School Leaders and Teachers, Fall 2023.”](#) This brief, published September 5, 2024, and the full report were prepared by Megan Besecker and Andrew Thomas, Ph.D. In some instances, quotes from the full report were edited for brevity and clarity.

The views expressed in the brief and the report are those of the IAU and do not necessarily reflect those of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Board of Education, or any individual Board member.

The [Independent Analysis Unit \(IAU\)](#) consists of a Director, Lead Analyst, and Research Support Specialist. Our mission is to provide the Board with timely information and analysis to help improve the Board’s governance.