

## Early Childhood Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports Community of Practice: Multnomah Project LAUNCH Issue Brief

### Background



Before Multnomah Project LAUNCH began in 2010, there was a long-established Early Childhood Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (EC PBIS) Leadership Team in place that served as a collaboration among leaders of organizations implementing EC PBIS in Multnomah County. In late 2014, the local early learning hub (Early Learning Multnomah, ELM) organized its structure to include Communities of Practice.

A community of practice can be created specifically with the goal of building knowledge among those who share a profession or it may evolve because of members' common interest in a specific domain. Through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group, members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally.<sup>1</sup> In response, Multnomah Project LAUNCH facilitated process with ELM for the EC PBIS Leadership Team become an EC PBIS Community of Practice (CoP).

The EC PBIS CoP recognized the need for continued support to expand ECPBIS into more community settings, achieve implementation fidelity in these community settings, and devote more time for learning, sharing, and collaboration between practitioners.

### Understanding the Purpose & Value of the CoP

As part of the Multnomah Project LAUNCH evaluation, and to learn more about the successes, challenges, and perceived benefits and sustainability of the EC PBIS CoP, seven (7) key stakeholders were interviewed by phone. Stakeholders were individuals involved in varying ways with the CoP such as leadership team members, community-based early childhood mental health providers, and policy and systems coordinators as well as representatives from Early Learning Multnomah (ELM), Multnomah County's early learning hub. Most had been involved with the CoP since its inception, and had also been involved with Leadership Team and/or Coaches' Group.

To support these goals, Multnomah Project LAUNCH workforce development staff facilitated the process of restructuring the Leadership Team and Coaches' Group into a CoP, and subsequently, to provide continued staffing support to the CoP to coordinate meeting logistics, send out agendas and meeting reminders, and take notes during meetings.

An initial project undertaken by the CoP was to pilot ECPBIS in kindergarten classrooms. This was done in partnership with ELM and the state-funded Early Kindergarten Transition (EKT) Program grant, and led to the identification of implementation supports needed for applying ECPBIS in kindergarten classrooms.

Additionally, to address needs voiced by community partners, multiple free EC PBIS trainings were offered over the course of the year, including two trainings in August and September of 2015. The first was a two-day training to increase the capacity of observers in reliable scoring of the Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) in Multnomah County. The second training focused on using the EC PBIS Implementation Toolkit. This toolkit training was designed using implementation science to facilitate the incorporation of the EC PBIS model into early childhood programs.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2015, the Leadership Team held a retreat to review progress and make decisions about how to move forward given the close of Project LAUNCH on October 1.

Stakeholders shared their perspectives on the purpose and value of the CoP, both to themselves professionally and to their organization. Interviewees discussed the uniqueness of this group lying in its longevity and passion. There are separate and clearly defined purposes of the Leadership Team and the Coaches' Group within the CoP, with the Leadership Team focused on early childhood system changes through the expansion of EC PBIS in the community, and the Coaches' Group focused on practice change through shared knowledge and collaboration at the practitioner level.

Stakeholders saw the **value of the CoP** in terms of:

- Continuing practitioner training and education through ongoing, peer support, collaboration between coaches on the families they work with; and collaboration between organizations
- Maintaining children in their early childhood and kindergarten settings by decreasing the number of expulsions and placements of Special Education children outside of their home school
- Giving teachers the tools to work with children and increase teachers' abilities in working with challenging behaviors
- Implementing EC PBIS in kindergarten classrooms
- Facilitating the expansion of EC PBIS in early childhood settings and implementing with fidelity
- Sharing knowledge about what is happening with EC PBIS in child care with other efforts, e.g., Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), legislative rulings, and equity-focused work at the county and state levels

First and most frequently, the CoP was described as creating a forum for **improving the connections** between EC PBIS coaches to improve skills, share resources, and increase collaboration.

*"The Coaches' Group is to increase coaches' abilities to implement EC PBIS, brainstorm issues, refine practices and observation skills, make sure we all see the same thing—that inter-rater reliability."*

*"I have shared during this time and the feedback has been really helpful and it is also really helpful to hear what others share and the feedback they receive. So the meetings have improved my practice, skills working with kids and families."*

Interviewees described a closer-knit community of practitioners as a result of the Coaches' Group, leading to more connections which, in turn, lead to **increased collaboration** between coaches on the families they work with.

*"Sometimes the kids we're working with overlap with other agencies' coaches. Before, we never had a way to communicate regarding the approach and strategies we use with these families—are we on the same page? The Coaches' Group helps us get to know each other better so it's easier to meet later with other coaches in order to collaborate on*

*specific families. The group has brought the community closer."*

Several interviewees shared how the CoP creates a forum for practitioners from different communities who may not have the opportunity to meet, to **come together and learn**. Different practices in different organizations, such as how Behavior Support Plans are written, can lead to confusion for teachers or families, and the CoP facilitated increased understanding and collaboration between EC PBIS coaches.

*"I'm much more aware and connected to what's going on in other organizations due to these Coaches' Groups. That's helpful. A lot of different early childhood programs are doing EC PBIS and each program has nuanced differences in how they do PBIS. Social, economic factors create differences and big programs are different than smaller programs."*

Additionally, stakeholders described the goal of **maintaining children in their schools** and classrooms by decreasing the number of expulsions and the number of children assigned to special education classrooms.



*"The [CoP] is the spot where everyone who is concerned about children's' emotional behavior and the importance of working on keeping children in continuity of care and not being kicked out of programs come together."*

In order to do this, interviewees described the important role of the CoP in **increasing supports for teachers** by developing their understanding of EC PBIS through community trainings as well as coaching.

*"Creating environments to keep teachers and give them the tools they need to work with individual children and also benefit all children."*

This goal is also represented in the drive to bring EC PBIS to kindergarten classrooms and the overarching goal of **expanding EC PBIS in the community**, to really "get it out there", and to make sure it is done with fidelity.

*"It is to support and perpetuate the movement towards having programs incorporate PBIS into their daily processes and move towards fidelity which at that point would be having things like PBIS in job descriptions and true use of BIRs [Behavior Incident Reports]."*

## Specific Accomplishments

Stakeholders were asked to describe what they saw as the most significant accomplishments so far of the EC PBIS CoP. Most frequently mentioned was the success of the **Coaches' Group**. Stakeholders noted an overall increase in coaching skills, increased collaboration between agencies and coaches, an increased use of and ability to score and utilize the observation tools due to participation in the Coaches' Group, and ultimately, increased capacity of teachers to work with children with challenging behaviors.

*"[Early childhood programs] have become much more competent with EC PBIS...I used to have to spend a lot more time there making plans for kids with challenging behaviors but now they have the capacity to do it themselves."*



Additional aspects of the work were frequently mentioned, including:

- The **increased excitement** around EC PBIS and the **increased awareness and participation** of other organizations as EC PBIS implementation partners, such as Portland Public Schools
- The myriad EC PBIS **trainings** that occurred throughout the year
- Increased **awareness** of EC PBIS trainings because of a shared training and events calendar, maintained by an EC PBIS leadership team member organization
- The noticeable **skills developed** and the **increased use of implementation observation tools** due to EC PBIS trainings and Coaches' Group
- The work that has gone into creating a measure of **fidelity of implementation**
- Using **additional grant** funding to pilot EC PBIS in kindergarten classrooms

## Challenges & Sustainability

A variety of challenges were mentioned by respondents. The most frequently-voiced challenge was related to the ongoing engagement of current and new participants in the Coaches' Group:

### *What Supported Success?*

When asked what has helped most to make the CoP successful, the most frequent response was related to ongoing support from all levels for convening. This support came from Coaches' Group attendees participating consistently and fully in the meetings, agency supervisors encouraging staff to attend and allowing time for facilitators to prepare as well as convene the Coaches' Group, and staff provided by LAUNCH to keep meeting minutes and send out agendas, notes, and reminders, ultimately helping to "pull everything together."

A number of respondents noted the importance of getting many voices to the table for the CoP and the willingness of coaches to share and ask questions, creating richer discussion and learning opportunities during the Coaches' Group.

Due to busy and often shifting schedules, finding time to attend was a notable obstacle for coaches.

Supervisors allowing, and often encouraging, staff to attend during work hours enabled greater and more consistent attendance. Work time was also allocated for meeting preparation and conference attendance by Coaches' Group facilitators, allowing for more informed discussions during the Coaches' Group.

Other factors that were described as supporting progress included:

- Funding through LAUNCH to support expansion of EC PBIS and invest in workforce development opportunities
- The dedication of Leadership Team and Coaches' Group members in applying for additional grants
- The support of the regional Northwest EC PBIS network
- The importance of having a work plan and identified goals for both the Leadership Team and the Coaches' Group
- Disseminating EC PBIS to families through early childhood program manuals and parent-teacher meetings
- Applying EC PBIS with an equity lens to reduce disparities in expulsions

*"Certain people attended every month and some could only attend once or twice -- I think that's okay but also there's a richer discussion, more opportunity for shared learning when people are*

*there consistently. I wouldn't require it but it is helpful."*

There was a call for diversifying the participants in the Coaches' Group, to include more kindergarten and school-age EC PBIS coaches. Some respondents also felt there was a need for more representatives from child care centers and, specifically, those from private child care organizations. Several stakeholders also mentioned a need for parents to attend. One interviewee suggested inviting members of the Parent Accountability Council of the Early Learning Multnomah, early learning Hub.

To address these concerns, stakeholders identified a number of strategies such as continuing to revisit the time and location of the group and making changes when beneficial, continuing to search for funds to support staff attendance, creating goals that add value to the work of attendees rather than adding to their workload, offering advanced Oregon Registry credits to non-licensed providers for attending, inviting members of ELM's Parent Accountability Council to Leadership Team or Coaches' Group meetings, and offering a financial stipend for parents to attend.

Stakeholders discussed the need to secure more grant funding to support Coaches' Group facilitators to prepare for and facilitate meetings, for staff to attend meetings and trainings, and for a designated staff person to take notes at the meetings and send out reminders. Several stakeholders mentioned the dedication of participants in applying for and securing grants like the state-funded Kindergarten Readiness Partnership & Innovation grant, which was seen as a sustainability strategy. Others also noted the continued need for additional financial support for EC PBIS implementation in the community, including legislative and/or other local or state-level supports.

*"If we were to rely on volunteers, the meetings wouldn't happen consistently. If there was no clarity or reminders about the next meeting, it would fall off our radar as a priority."*

Additionally, stakeholders discussed a need for more culturally-specific participation in EC PBIS implementation and in CoP attendance. Several shared the potential to advance equity through EC PBIS practice.

*"I think EC PBIS fits in with [ELM's focus on equity] by maintaining kids in preschools...I do EC PBIS with an equity lens when training...We have helped teachers reframe their thoughts about behaviors in kids."*

Respondents also expressed the desire to continue to offer free, open trainings for early childhood providers more frequently, i.e., EC PBIS Module 1 trainings on more than a quarterly basis. Additionally, there was a suggestion for a permanent, free, online, public space to share EC PBIS documents, tools, and information about upcoming trainings.



Although future funding sources and staffing of the EC PBIS CoP is uncertain, respondents talked about the CoP as something they were committed to seeing continue.

*"The funding stream is limited and yet the commitment is dramatic for those involved... This CoP was lucky in that regard because it had existed for a long time before [ELM] and will struggle to stay in existence even if the Hub doesn't support it, although that's much harder to do."*

In summary, EC PBIS CoP interviewees described challenges related to engaging members to continue and expand participation from a diverse range of programs and perspectives in both the Leadership Team and Coaches Group. This could be accomplished through framing EC PBIS with an equity lens to more explicitly emphasize its purpose to reduce disproportionate expulsions of children of Color. Interviewees also noted that being able to identify staffing supports to convene meetings and communicate with members was seen as important. Identifying additional funding sources was described as a primary challenge in order to continue to offer free, open trainings for early childhood providers, and continue workforce development strategies for coaches.

These challenges were seen as important to address because of the benefits and value of the EC PBIS CoP, which respondents described as providing early childhood providers and teachers with tools to increase their ability to work with children with challenging behaviors, and to maintain children in early childhood programs and home schools. The CoP was described as instrumental to implementing EC PBIS with fidelity in early childhood settings, and building the capacity of coaches in the county to continue implementation and expansion in early childhood and school settings.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). *Pyramid Model implementation toolkit*. Retrieved August 3, 2015 from: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/pyramidmodelimplementationtoolkit>

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## Endnote

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