



An Examination of Student Crime, Violence, and Academic Performance in Public Schools

Edward J. Sabornie¹, Cathy L. Crossland², Emily H. Griffith³, Mityl Biswas⁴

North Carolina State University (United States)^{1 2 3 4}

Abstract

Ensuring the safety of students at school receives justifiable attention in light of the rampant school violence and crime in the United States. Reduction of school crime and violence, and the safety of all students in attendance, is now as important as improving reading and math test scores in all grades. Implementing the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) framework in schools is a recent intervention model meant to ensure low rates of problem behavior in school. The PBIS model is a behavioral prevention technique that concentrates on providing positive reinforcement and related methods to “catch kids being good” rather than constant punishment of student misbehavior. In the U.S. state of North Carolina (the site of this research), PBIS implementation includes three levels, and the requirements for each level are found here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o9srvNCBoHyfXhNjy0AEa32yvBhecc5l/view>.

The purpose of the present study was to compare PBIS school implementation versus traditionally organized schools in terms of overall schoolwide academic performance and the incidence rate of school crime and violence committed by students. All public schools in the state of North Carolina were involved (n = 2,433) during school year 2015-2016. There were 269 Green Ribbon PBIS schools, 211 Model PBIS schools, and 115 Exemplar PBIS schools included in the 2,433 total schools examined. The major research question was: During one school year were PBIS schools more successful in demonstrating lower student crime and violence and enhancing student academic achievement in comparison to traditional public schools? Results showed that PBIS schools experienced significantly lower school-related crime and violence than did traditional public schools in the majority of the 16 different types of school crime and violence examined. Traditional public schools, however, demonstrated higher overall academic school performance than did all three types of PBIS schools, but Exemplar PBIS schools showed the highest scores in schoolwide reading and math performance. Rates of certain types of school-related violence or crime (e.g., assault on school personnel; possession of alcohol at school) were significantly positively correlated with (a) overall school academic performance, and (b) schoolwide functioning in reading and math. Odds ratios slightly favored traditional public schools in terms of general academic achievement and reading differences across school type. Implications related to PBIS school implementation, and how such a framework can assist in school crime prevention and enhancing student academic achievement, will be discussed.

Keywords: school crime, school violence, academic achievement.