



*This guide was produced by the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project at Vanderbilt University—one of three projects across the state funded by the Tennessee Department of Education to provide training and technical assistance to schools as they address social and behavioral needs of students. This brief was authored by Madelaine Ferrell, Melissa C. Hine, A. Dia Davis, Becky Haynes, Tara Axelroth, Brooke C. Shuster, Casey B. Chauvin, Blair P. Lloyd, and Erik W. Carter. 6/2020*

### efining Student Involvement in RTI<sup>2</sup>-B

Response to Instruction and Intervention for Behavior (RTI<sup>2</sup>-B) is Tennessee's multi-tiered system of behavior support. In these systems, and particularly for Tier I supports, it is important to prioritize student involvement. When students feel they have a voice in school-wide initiatives such as RTI<sup>2</sup>-B, they will be more motivated to engage in the multiple facets of the system. For example, if students help develop the school-wide acknowledgement system, they might be more motivated to earn their selected privileges and incentives (e.g., raffles for prom tickets; preferred seating at assemblies). RTI<sup>2</sup>-B is a school-wide framework, so input is needed from all members of the school community, including staff, families, and students. Studies have shown that

students seldom have a role in school decision-making processes and usually have even fewer opportunities to participate in school improvement efforts.<sup>1</sup> Schools with high levels of meaningful student involvement tend to have six key characteristics that relate to their school culture.

#### Six Key Characteristics

1. School-wide approaches
2. High levels of student authority
3. Interrelated strategies
4. Sustainable structures of support
5. Personal commitment
6. Strong learning connections



## Six Key Characteristics

The following elements are consistently identified in schools where students and adults commonly agree that there are high levels of meaningful student involvement.

Characteristic	Description	Example
1. School-wide approaches	All students in all grades are involved in decision making and advocacy initiatives regarding the RTI <sup>2</sup> -B framework.	Students are shown school-wide data during their advisory or homeroom period and discuss ideas for how to make improvements together as a class.
2. High levels of student authority	School faculty validate students' ideas, knowledge, opinions, and experiences to improve the school.	Schools use the ideas generated by students during advisory. They communicate to students that all ideas were reviewed; identify which ones will be incorporated; and continue to ask for feedback.
3. Interrelated strategies	Students are given learning, teaching, and leadership opportunities in the school to make sustainable school improvements.	Student leadership teams learn about RTI <sup>2</sup> -B and work with the RTI <sup>2</sup> -B team to update the Tier I Implementation Manual and teach their peers components of the plan in multiple ways.
4. Sustainable structures of support	To promote meaningful student involvement, the school creates and amends policies and procedures.	Schools provide a variety of ways for students to offer input and become involved with the Tier I plan. These opportunities are regularly scheduled and communicated.
5. Personal commitment	Students and adults acknowledge that to improve their RTI <sup>2</sup> -B framework, they need to have a mutual investment.	Students are able to have meaningful, structured, and frequent collaboration with adults where their ideas become part of the Tier I plan.
6. Strong learning connections	Student involvement is connected to classroom learning and is relevant for both teachers and students.	Elective courses are offered for credit to facilitate collaboration with adults. Examples include Leadership for interested students or Freshman Academy for all Freshman.

Adapted from *Fletcher (2005)*



## Benefits of Student Involvement

Including students in the RTI<sup>2</sup>-B process will create a lasting and positive impact on the Tier I plan. One benefit to involving students is improved student buy-in. Students have unique knowledge and perspective about their school that adults cannot fully replicate.<sup>1</sup> By gathering input from and involving students in the Tier I plan, school staff move away from “doing things to students” to “working with students.”<sup>3</sup> Giving students a voice in school priorities and initiatives is an effective way to improve student outcomes and allows for messages to be shared in student friendly language.<sup>3,4</sup> In addition, finding creative ways to seek student input and involve students in the process provides opportunities for student leadership.<sup>3</sup>

## Summary

Throughout planning and implementation, schools need to make sure that they are involving students in Tier I of RTI<sup>2</sup>-B. Ensuring students are involved improves student buy-in, establishes that adults are “working with students” instead of “doing things to students,” shares messages in student friendly language, and provides opportunities for student leadership.

## For Further Reading

Feuerborn, L., Wallace, C., & Tyre, A. (2016). A qualitative analysis of middle and high school teacher perceptions of school wide positive behavior supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 18(4), 219-229.

Mitra, D. (2006). Increasing student voice. *The Prevention Researcher*, 13(1), 7-10.

Smyth, J. (2006). When students have power. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 285-298.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Mitra, D. L. (2009). Strengthening student voice initiatives in high school: An examination of the supports needed for school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Youth & Society*, 40(3), 311-335.

<sup>2</sup>Fletcher, A. (2005). *Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Students as Partners in School Change*, 2.

<sup>3</sup>Good, C., & Lindsay, P. (n.d.). *Student voice: Strategies to involve students in PBIS* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.pbis.org>

<sup>4</sup>Scales, P. C., Van Boekel, M., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2020). Effects of developmental relationships with teachers on middle school students' motivation and performance. *Psychology in the Schools*, 57, 646-677.



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