

Insights from Jolly Toddlers:

Reflections on Practice of PBIS and Correspondence to E3

By MaryKay Mahar and Katie Rubinstein

Two exciting things happened at the Jolly Toddlers Early Education Center in this year. First, their recent E3 scores showed that Jolly Toddlers exceeded the average scores in every sub-scale which out-performed most other equivalent centers. Secondly, Jolly Toddlers was recognized by the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports for implementing PBIS “on advanced tiers with fidelity for the past five years” (www.pbis.org/community/early-childhood, 2017).

In order to understand more about this connection between a high quality early learning center and PBIS, we examined the shared goals of both E3 and PBIS, and chatted with the director at Jolly Toddlers.

Jolly Toddlers Early Education Center

Jolly Toddlers Early Education Center is a family owned early childhood program in Southampton, Bucks County, operating since 1984. The program is certified by the PA Department of Human Services, and licensed by the PA Department of Education as an accredited private academic nursery and kindergarten school. The center has multiple classrooms and serves over 100 children from infants through pre-kindergarten, with Pre-K Counts slots integrated into two pre-kindergarten classrooms to provide state-funded prioritized quality pre-k for at-risk children. Additionally, over 25% of children enrolled at Jolly Toddlers are funded through Pennsylvania's Child Care Works Subsidized Child Care Program. They have been participating in Keystone STARS since 2004, maintaining a STAR 4 for the past 10 years and serving Pre-K Counts families for over five years.

What is PBIS?

PBIS is based on a [Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children](#). Implemented in over 23,000 schools nationwide, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive classroom management strategy that can be utilized with early childhood through high school ages. In the context of early childhood, it is a framework for promoting positive adult-child relationships,



adult-adult relationships, child-child relationships and child-adult relationships through three tiers of supports based on individual child needs. The PBIS tiered model of prevention is “designed to build social competence and prevent challenging behaviors for young children.” Programs begin adoption of PBIS by establishing an internal core team and defining goals. They are guided by a qualified consultant who assists in evaluating

current behavioral challenges within the classrooms before establishing a behavior support plan. The core team, external consultant, and teachers implement the PBIS behavior support plan and engage in ongoing evaluation of effectiveness through functional assessment. Each center uses the [Early Childhood System-Wide Evaluation Tool](#) to guide and revise practices and to determine annual goals.

What is E3?

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Third Edition (E3) which was released in 2014 shifts the observed indicators to focus more on intentional teaching and adult-child interactions for preschool age groups (3-5 year olds). The E3 scale offers a reliable and valid instrument to assess this process quality. Internationally tested and accepted early childhood observational assessment tools, the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) are used within the Keystone STARS system to provide feedback to programs as they develop continuous quality improvement plans.

Recent E3 scores for Jolly Toddlers reveal that this site is out-performing many of its peer sites on this assessment of program quality. Jolly Toddlers exceeded the average scores in every subscale, achieving the highest scores (7) for the following items: 1. Indoor Space; 2. Room arrangement for play and learning; and 30. Staff-child interaction. These three items directly relate to the PBIS focus on teacher-child relationships and optimal classroom set-up.

ECERS-3 items	What you might observe
1. Indoor space	This item addresses how comfortable the environment is, and how well it meets the needs of the children and staff in the group. As per the Notes for Clarification, the space also “helps the staff be more efficient in meeting their needs” and “gives children more play activities to learn and engage in at the same time.” Children and staff appear comfortable in the environment and are able to engage in play activities without too much difficulty with the space.
2. Room arrangement for play and learning	This item defines the number of interest centers that should be accessible that are clearly defined for a specific type of play. Children can independently access the materials that support their interests. The centers are equipped with appropriate furnishings to use the materials and enough space to support the number of children permitted at one time. There are places designed for active play and others that are quiet or cozy.
30. Staff-child interaction	This item addresses the number of positive interactions, verbal and nonverbal, observed between staff and children, whether they address their problems sensitively, with support and comfort. “Positive interactions give children the message that they are good, valuable, and competent and appreciated for who they are and what they do.” (ERSI, 2017.) Teachers join in children’s play, listen to children’s communication and engage them in conversations.

How does PBIS correspond to E3?

PBIS and E3 share a focus on staff-child interactions and supporting positive behavior through developmentally appropriate room arrangement and indoor space. Both PBIS and E3 look for positive interactions that give children the message that they are valued and appreciated for who they are and what they do. Both PBIS and

E3 support the importance of classroom practice in promoting social and emotional development. We believe that implementation of PBIS supports overall program quality identified by the E3 and may improve outcomes for young children and their families.

Lessons Learned from Jolly Toddlers Early Learning Center

A conversation with the director: How can a director implement PBIS?

In an interview with Nancy Thompson, director at Jolly Toddlers, she was emphatic that strong and supportive administration is key to implementing PBIS strategies in the classrooms and in preparing for an E3 assessment. Nancy shared further insight for program administrators implementing PBIS.

How did teachers initially respond when you informed them the center was going to be implementing PBIS?

I know teachers are anxious and I understand what it feels like to have people come into your classroom to assess your practice. Change has to be intentionally done. I don't want directors or teachers to think that PBIS is simple because the strategies are clear and simple. Change is not simple. Teachers are at a certain level and I visualize the whole program rising to another level.

As it rises, some teachers may not be on board to rise to the next level and will fall out. You need a leader who accepts that, but supports teachers in growing. A leader who embraces implementation and supports and coaches teachers with kindness and patience is critical.

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Do you believe transitioning to PBIS had a positive impact on teacher retention?

When you decide to implement PBIS, you are committing to creating a culture in your program based on the belief that positive behavior reinforcement is effective and expected at every level. Our teachers support that culture in their classrooms and I support it more broadly with parents and team building, and positive maintenance. I think I was able to keep teachers who shared my long term goals by helping the PBIS coach slowly build this new culture in each classroom. The reason teachers became more invested is because I would decide how to take on a new process or when to change things. Respecting the pace of change with teachers is key to keeping them on board. They certainly became more committed as they saw evidence that PBIS strategies were working.

PBIS is about changing the way every person in the center interacts and positively supports children and each other. Starting a new initiative of this scale might seem daunting to staff, how did you make the implementation of PBIS manageable for your staff?

We started transparently implementing in one room, and then went forth to the whole center. With the first classroom, we created simple rules for indoors and rules for the playground. We rein-

forced the basic concept with the children that you are a bucket-filler if you follow the rules. If you don't follow the rules, you are a bucket-dipper. The concept was easy for teachers to define and create visual reminders within the classroom at child's eye level. The kids loved the idea of being a bucket-filler. When they pointed to a peer as a "bucket-dipper," the teacher knew to respond to facilitate the conversation and reinforce positive behavior expectations. Even the really skeptical teachers started to buy-in as they saw improved behavior and became comfortable with the PBIS system.

Can you give examples of simple PBIS strategies or supports within the classroom?

One strategy is visual cues and behavior reinforcement. At the child's eye level, we have pictures of buckets in every room to reinforce the bucket-filler concept. The buckets have Velcro on them and children earn flowers, through positive behaviors, to stick on the buckets. The goal is to find something positive in every child's behavior on an ongoing basis. After children earn enough flowers to fill their buckets, they get a reward.

The base of your system is the rules of the classroom. You have to keep them simple and age-appropriate. Another strategy is to collaborate with the children in any developmentally appropriate way. You could ask children for ideas of two rules for two-year-olds, three rules for three-year-olds, etc. The children actually did give sug-



gestions and the PBIS coach helped us tweak our language into a positive intervention. Instead of saying "no running" for example, teachers would ask "are you using your walking feet?" The shift to reflective questions for teachers felt challenging initially, but they developed skills to help children identify which rules they were or were not following. They became comfortable with the intentional language that positively reinforces the rules.

How would you suggest supporting teachers in learning PBIS and providing feedback?

I suggest developing a feedback system based on a reliable observation tool for early childhood teachers. I use the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) to complete teacher observations and give teachers copies of the TPOT tool prior to the observations. I try to model the PBIS philosophy and share my feedback with a positive lens to reinforce their strengths and identify areas for growth. Additionally, the PBIS coach communicates with the director to identify staff capacity for change and lets the director decide



the best way to address challenges in learning a new approach to classroom management. It is important for directors to know their teachers and respond to their needs as they guide them through change. If the director or admin team isn't fully on board for long term planning and committed to change, it will impact the success of implementing PBIS.

Throughout the interview, Nancy reinforced the idea that implementation of any professional development model must be prefaced by the director's or administrative team's self-reflection of how they plan to support the content for staff. Particularly in translating staff training to implementation of PBIS; the leadership has to be present and engaged.

Policy Implications

Given the strong correlations identified between PBIS and overall program quality as demonstrated by E3, we commend the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) on including the implementation of PBIS with fidelity as recognized by the PA PBIS Network as a bonus indicator in the revised Keystone STARS standards. Furthermore, we support the use of OCDEL quality funds to facilitate PBIS implementation. The program-wide lens of PBIS engages all levels of instructional and administrative staff in building positive relationships with children and their caregivers, reinforcing the core principals of Keystone STARS:

- A whole child approach to education is essential to meeting the holistic and individual needs of each and every child and family.
- Knowledgeable and responsive early care and education professionals are essential to the development of children and the support of families.
- Building and sustaining ongoing positive relationships among children, families, early care and education professionals and community stakeholders is essential for the growth and development of every child.

Initial implementation of PBIS is intensive and costly. Over time, however, programs can develop internal coaches to sustain the initiative. We recommend that OCDEL consider allocating technical assistance and professional development resources to support sites in implementing PBIS.

To learn more about Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) visit [Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports](#)

To learn more about ECERS-3 visit [Environmental Scales Institute](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nancy Thompson opened Jolly Toddlers in 1984 with a background as a Registered Nurse. Nancy received her degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education in 1980. She received her Master's degree in Counseling in 1986. She has been committed to continuous quality improvement and team building. Her vision of high quality for Jolly Toddlers is grounded in the goal of giving the best educational foundation to the children in her program, and developing their self-confidence during physical and emotional growth. Nancy is also committed to the education of her staff and encouraging their self-confidence and emotional growth.

MaryKay Mahar is the Keystone STARS Manager for the Southeast Regional Key at PHMC. MaryKay worked in diverse roles within early childhood education prior to joining PHMC, such as Race to the Top Manager, Keystone STARS Coach, PQAS Certified Trainer, and Center Director. MaryKay holds a Bachelor's degree in Letters, Arts, and Sciences from The Pennsylvania State University and Master's degree in Educational Psychology from Temple University. She is interested in exploring further implementation of PBIS in early childhood settings, believing the strategies in implementing are grounded in developmentally appropriate practices.

Katie Rubinstein is the Director of Quality Initiatives for the ECE component of PHMC, serving as the lead for multiple projects with a shared vision of improving outcomes for young children. Katie holds a Master's degree in early childhood education and was trained in ECERS 3 from the authors and CLASS certified in preschool. She has nearly 20 years of experience in the implementation of continuous quality improvement programs. Over the years, her responsibilities and leadership role continued to evolve within the PA Keys to Quality system, including experience as a Specialist, Designator and Keystone STARS Manager. Katie's diverse experience allowed her to develop a high-level understanding of the challenges that exist in ensuring all children have access to high quality care and early learning experience, especially for those who are struggling with the effects of deep poverty and other risk factors for success. As a regional leader, she is dedicated to meeting the needs of families and the practitioners who support them.



The Early Childhood Action Collective (ECAC) is an initiative of Public Health Management Corporation, sponsored by the William Penn Foundation. ECAC is a multi-disciplinary consortium comprising researchers, policy experts, and practitioners who share a commitment to creating a better future for Philadelphia's children by informing policy and practice decisions to help move Philadelphia's early childhood education sector forward.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.