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Is Waiting for My School Leader to Retire My Only Solution to Bring About Change?

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IS WAITING FOR MY SCHOOL LEADER TO RETIRE MY ONLY SOLUTION TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

Posted by Hank Bohanon | Sep 10, 2020 |
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by [Hank Bohanon](#)

Once upon a time, I was working with a high school team that was implementing school-wide [positive behavior support](#) (PBS). One of the team members was in tears as they reviewed their action plan. When I asked the group what was wrong, they shared that their administrator was not supportive of the PBS approach. She (the administrator) did not believe in the overall philosophy of taking a more proactive, positive approach. She also was actively finding ways to prevent the committees' efforts. Her resistance strategies included not providing financial resources or time for professional development. The team was devastated!

My advice to the team at the time was to focus on starting with a small pilot of schoolwide PBS with a specific grade level, summer school cohort, or department. I hoped that by creating local evidence that the approach might work could help the administrator see the value of the plan (see [this](#) study that illustrates this approach).

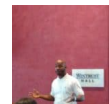
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My other recommendation was to wait for the principal to retire if my first recommendation did not work...Thankfully, there has been more research since that time on how to obtain buy-in from administrators to implement schoolwide efforts.



Photographer: [Ross Findon](#) | Source: [Unsplash](#)

Kent McIntosh and his colleagues developed an excellent study that included insights into how to obtain administrator's support for schoolwide efforts. The following are three scenarios you might face based on their study:

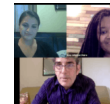
ADMINISTRATOR DISAGREES WITH THE APPROACH

As in the example I provided above, sometimes administrators may have a misunderstanding of the intent of the schoolwide intervention. For example, an administrator might think that implementing PBS means that teachers should never correct students, or should just hand out cookies.

ADMINISTRATOR SEES THE STAFF AS UNSUPPORTIVE

In other cases, the administration might know the importance of a schoolwide initiative but is

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concerned that the staff is not supportive. In some instances, staff resistance could be due to philosophical differences, a lack of resources, or the way the intervention was initially introduced to the community.

ADMINISTRATOR DOES NOT PROVIDE STAFF WITH TIME TO SUPPORT THE INITIATIVE

Perhaps the administrator loves the idea of implementing a schoolwide approach, like social and emotional learning. However, staff and leadership team members may not be provided with time to plan and execute the approach outside of their daily responsibilities. During my early research, I came across perhaps an 11th and unwritten commandment, “Thou will not add one more thing to our plate.”

The following infographic matches these concerns with some recommendations provided by Kent’s article.

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FACTORS THAT HELP OR HINDER ADMINISTRATIVE BUY IN, BASED ON MCINTOSH, KELM, & CANIZAL DELABRA (2016)

Hindering Factors

Administrator disagrees with the philosophy behind the school-wide approach

Administrator sees their staff as unsupportive of the approach

Administrator is unsupportive of the time commitments required for the school-wide efforts

Helping Factors

Connect administrators to networks of other schools implementing school-wide efforts so they can hear from others with similar experiences

Learn how school-wide efforts align with their personal values

Have first-hand experience of how the intervention can work through a small pilot

Help administrators see the need for the school-wide effort through their own data

Attend an informative school-wide training related to your approach

Obtain support from an external coach to help the leader to learn more about the commitments that are needed

Ask the the administrator to attend school-wide team meetings

Adapted from McIntosh, K., Kelm, J. L., & Canizal Delabra, A. (2016). In search of how principals change: A qualitative study of events that help and hinder administrator support for school-wide PBIS. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 18(2), 100-110. doi:10.1177/1098300715599960.

For more information on working with administrators, see the book *Implementing Systematic Interventions: A Guide for Secondary School Teams* published by Routledge Press.

Infographic by Choobe Maambo and Hank Bohanon, Loyola University of Chicago

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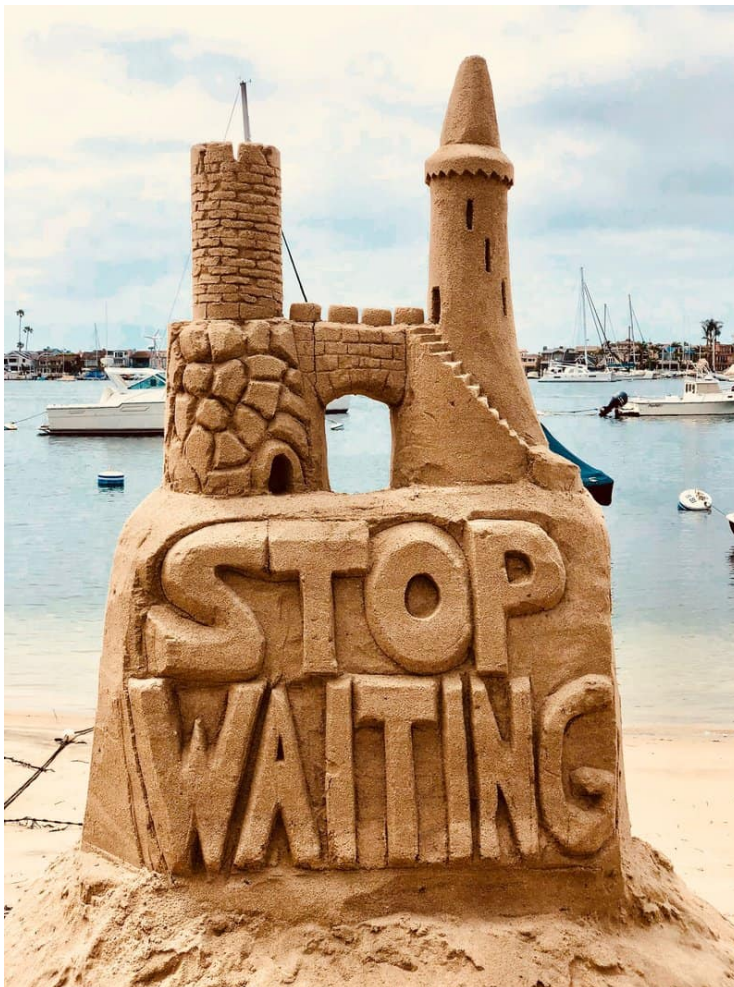


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There is undoubtedly more to developing administrative support for an initiative. My point here is that administrative support is a [critical system component](#). The strategies recommended here may be one way to build support for your efforts.

We recommend reading Kent's [article](#) for more information on this topic. Additionally, for more details on how administrative support works within a systemic, schoolwide intervention, check out our new book [*Implementing Systematic Interventions: A Guide for Secondary School Teams*](#) from Routledge Press.



Photographer: [James Lee](#) | Source: [Unsplash](#)

I would love to hear your thoughts about how you have developed administrative support and secured buy-in. Please leave a comment below about your experience or recommendations.

Hank Bohanon is a Professor at the Loyola University of Chicago. He focuses his research on multi-tiered systems of support and school improvement in secondary school settings. For more information see his [website](#), or contact him by email (hbohano@luc.edu)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hank Bohanon

Dr. Hank Bohanon has been a special education teacher in the Dallas Public Schools. He also has served a project coordinator at the University of Kansas for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs research on positive behavior supports. He is a professor in School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. There he founded and served

Chicago. There he founded and served as the director of the Center for School Evaluation, Intervention, and Training (CSEIT). He is a former member of the board of directors for the Association of Positive Behavior Support. His research includes three-tiered academic and behavior supports in urban and suburban settings. His

current work focuses on supports for high school settings related to positive behavior support, response to intervention, social and emotional learning, and school mental health.

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