



Briefing Note: Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide evaluation – high level findings

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
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Purpose of report

1. This paper is to provide an update on the evaluation of Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide (PB4L-SW) and share the high-level findings to date.

Summary

2. The paper describes our initial findings of what works well and what gets in the way of successfully implementing and sustaining PB4L-SW. These high-level findings are drawn from interviews with Ministry of Education School-Wide practitioners and Resource Teachers Learning Behaviour (RTLb) staff, as well as perspectives of schools and Ministry staff who participated in 'SenseMaker' story collection and workshops¹.
3. High-level findings so far show the flexible design of PB4L-SW, combined with clear and structured steps and a strong theoretical base, are important to establishing it. PB4L-SW is implemented and maintained well when the following factors are present: ongoing training and cluster hui; having a committed principal, leadership team and School-Wide practitioners; and when people invest time to get the foundations right. Implementation and maintenance of PB4L-SW also works well when evidence and data informs practice, and when PB4L-SW schools refresh and continually review their approach over time.
4. PB4L-SW implementation and maintenance doesn't work well when there is staff resistance, when people don't put in adequate time, when different initiatives are implemented independently and in silos, and when there is high staff turnover.
5. With the PB4L refresh planned for 2022, there are several potential next steps. Two examples are: incentivising a braided approach with more integrated ways of working with other initiatives,

¹ Narrative data was collected from teachers, students and Ministry staff using an online tool. Participants were asked to provide brief stories about their experience of the school. Respondents took part in SenseMaking workshops to talk about the ways PB4L-SW had contributed to changes.

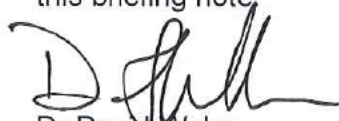
such as Restorative Practice, and making the socio-cultural² function of PB4L-SW more explicit. The refresh could also address the challenges of showing PB4L's effectiveness through data.

Proactive release

Agree that this Briefing is not proactively released.

Disagree

As this is an interim update and some findings may change, we recommend not proactively releasing this briefing note.



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Te Pae Aronui



Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

22/12/21

09/01/2021 2022

² Socio cultural theory focuses on how a child's environment, including cultural beliefs and attitudes, affect how learning takes place.

Background

6. PB4L-SW was introduced in 2010 and is designed to create positive school environments and to strengthen relationships, inclusion and belonging. PB4L-SW is part of the universal, school-wide layer within the tiered model of support, which aims for flexible support for students, whānau and those working in education, as part of the Learning Support Delivery Model. PB4L SW begins with universal support across the whole school and wider community then is increasingly targeted as needs are identified through data. This tiered model of support allows for flexible support for students, whānau and those working in education as part of the Learning Support Delivery Model.
7. When PB4L-SW was introduced, it was targeted at secondary and low-decile non-secondary schools with a high proportion of Māori and Pacific students. One PB4L-SW practitioner supported up to 20 schools each. From 2018, PB4L-SW expanded in scope to include 1050 schools (41.8% of all schools). With this increase in demand, the ratio of School-Wide practitioners to PB4L-SW schools is now 1 per 41 schools, with some regional variation. The number of PB4L schools has steadily increased over time and it is predominantly provided to low and mid-decile schools.

Links to related work

8. This briefing on the PB4L-SW evaluation also has connections to:
 - *Briefing Note: Positive Behaviour for Learning Suite of Initiatives* [METIS 1249524 refers], 2 March 2021
 - *Briefing Note: Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide* [METIS 1245412 refers], 7 December 2020
 - *Briefing Note: Update on PB4L for Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministerial Group Meeting 2 August 2021* [METIS: 1264451 refers], 16 July 2021
 - *Education Report: Setting the Direction of Work to Strengthen Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide*, [METIS: 1264963 refers], 7 July 2021

Evaluation purpose and process

9. An evaluation of PB4L-SW implementation was last carried out by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in 2015³. Since then, changes have been made to the schooling context that may impact the way schools respond to student behaviour, such as:
 - The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015
 - The 2016 Learning Support restructure
 - The 2017 Physical Restraint and Seclusion guidelines.
10. This new evaluation of PB4L-SW examines how PB4L-SW functions in light of changes to the schooling context and demands on School-Wide practitioners. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify the strengths, enablers and barriers to effective implementation and maintenance of PB4L-SW. The evaluation examines how to better-align PB4L-SW with the Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM), so strong, foundational universal support is maintained.
11. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach drawing on Ministry data sources, data from the Wellbeing@School survey, interviews with PB4L-SW and RTLB practitioners, and stories from school staff, students, whānau and Ministry staff. The story collection used a participatory process whereby participants submitted stories via an online tool and answered questions about their story. As at 9 December 2021, 1593 stories had been submitted from PB4L-SW schools and 70 stories from regional and national Ministry staff. Fifty school leaders, teachers and Ministry

staff, including School-Wide practitioners and national office staff, have participated in regional workshops and reflected on the narratives.

12. COVID-19 has meant we've experienced delays with the evaluation project, due to being unable to run workshops in schools and kura. We've adapted by running some workshops online. We expect to have a final evaluation report to you by the end of March 2022.
13. The high-level themes from the interviews and regional workshops are outlined below. Early findings from Ministry data and school narratives are briefly described, but these are yet to be reviewed and finalised.

High level findings

What works

The PB4L-SW design and associated training

14. The structure and design of PB4L provides a strong foundation for effectively establishing PB4L-SW in schools. The PB4L-SW approach is grounded in evidence and has clear steps on how to bring a shared school and community vision into action and set the school's direction. Schools appreciate knowing what to expect, as well as the time and resource they are committing to it.
15. The PB4L-SW training and ongoing cluster hui are important to its success. The clusters set up an additional layer of ongoing support. Schools share experiences with each other, and this provides motivation and support for PB4L leaders to maintain implementation efforts.
16. The flexible design that respects school and community values lays the groundwork for an inclusive and equitable learning environment. The process of developing shared values unique to the school and community provides impetus for strengthening whānau relationships and sets up an inclusive school culture. PB4L-SW offers a culturally responsive approach that puts relationships at its centre. School-Wide practitioners noted Kura Kuapapa Māori schools were particularly strong at developing shared values between school and community.

Having the right people on board

17. All groups cited a committed principal and a strong leadership team was the number-one enabler of PB4L-SW being successfully implemented and sustained. Principal endorsement and support is particularly important at the start of the process, along with staff who have the mana and time to commit to the work. A mix of staff in the PB4L team, that may include teacher aides and office staff along with school leaders, was identified as an inclusive and effective model.
18. Support from Ministry School-Wide practitioners to guide, support and motivate schools and clusters helps safeguard schools staying on track. Regular visits to schools by School-Wide practitioners also has the indirect benefit of fostering ongoing relationships between schools and the Ministry of Education.
19. Interdisciplinary partnerships strengthen implementation success. When School-Wide practitioners work with RTLB and other learning support staff, the successful implementation of PB4L-SW is more likely.

Investing the time to do it well

20. It's important to take the time to get the foundations right and bring the whole school and community along. For PB4L-SW to work well, principals, leaders and the school need to be fully involved and committed to creating and owning shared values.
21. Embedding values into the school culture and strategic plan is also important. Taking the time to involve teachers and support staff, and get commitment to PB4L practices, will heighten PB4L implementation success. Having PB4L-SW prioritised in the school timetable, so it becomes an everyday part of what staff do, helps sustain this. Interviewees talked about the need for protected time with the classroom to teach PB4L-SW values.
22. Some School-Wide practitioners talked about the value of using a socio-cultural lens that prompts schools to examine how a child's environment, including cultural beliefs and attitudes, affect how

learning takes place. Making this explicit in the PB4L-SW implementation steps helps set the stage for having more robust conversations about equity and inclusion.

Bringing evidence into practice

23. Gathering and using data to highlight areas of concern and find solutions is critical. The evidence gathered through the initial collection of SETT data identifies what schools need to change. Ongoing data collection informs progress and provides the impetus for new solutions. In addition to guiding PB4L priorities, the data collection and reflection through PB4L serves to guide schools' future planning more generally.

Keeping it fresh and evolving

24. Keeping PB4L alive through reviewing and strengthening the PB4L matrix over time, and refreshing the plan, is needed. Having a strong emphasis on reflection, guided by the data collected through PB4L, supports this continuous growth.
25. Inducting new staff and continued upskilling of existing staff, ensures the knowledge and agreed direction for the school are not lost when staff change. All staff need to have clarity on the process for responding to behaviour, and to be 'living' the values and expectations.

What doesn't work

Staff resistance

26. Shifting deficit-based thinking takes time and effort. Some teachers retain a reluctance to use praise and tangible acknowledgements and default to using punitive strategies (like telling students off) when under stress. It can take a lot of effort to make small shifts in practice.
27. Teachers may be resistant to using extrinsic reward systems. This was observed more often in secondary schools where teachers may have a philosophy that students should be internally motivated, or teachers may have insufficient understanding of what PB4L really is. Staff may see PB4L as an imposition, and not part of their job.
28. Incongruence between theory and practice is also problematic in some schools - agreeing to the PB4L principles on the surface but not committing to implementing them.

Not putting in the time and taking shortcuts

29. Time is the biggest barrier to implementing PB4L-SW well. Schools need to be prepared to invest the time – particularly engaging with their community, eliciting shared values and embedding these into the school. When schools take short-cuts, PB4L-SW is not executed as it has been designed.

Implementation silos

30. Sustaining effort is more difficult when other new educational initiatives are being prioritised by schools. New initiatives redirect the energy staff were putting into PB4L-SW.
31. Working in silos when there are multiple initiatives is problematic. Although there is a theoretical alignment between PB4L and like initiatives, in practice they're often implemented independently. All interviewees recommended School-Wide practitioners, RTLB and Learning Support

colleagues align their shared goals and complementary practices at the start of implementing PB4L-SW.

PB4L practices erode with staff turnover

32. When leaders and staff leave, PB4L-SW practices can easily get eroded. When a principal departs from a school, the maintenance of PB4L-SW is particularly vulnerable. Some schools will actively recruit principals already committed to PB4L, to keep it alive in their school.
33. Ongoing work is required for School-Wide practitioners to keep schools committed and provide refresher training for new staff.

Does PB4L-SW fit with the Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM)?

Ideally matched but siloed in practice

34. PB4L is a universal initiative that initiates a shift away from deficit thinking that sees the child as the problem, towards looking at the system the child is within. This lays the groundwork for more targeted approaches. The features of PB4L-SW overlay well with the six LSDM elements, and PB4L-SW's flexibility allows it to accommodate the vast majority of other learning-support initiatives. Yet interviewees observed they too often worked independently of their learning-support colleagues and would like to see better integration.
35. An example is the relationship between PB4L-SW and Restorative Practice which both build on school values and make these explicit across the school community. However, siloed funding has discouraged alignment of effort and schools often see these related initiatives as independent of each other. These two initiatives provide complementary aspects towards the same goal – Restorative Practice gives schools the crucial motivation and PB4L provides the structures and systems to create change.

Braiding PB4L with other initiatives

36. Both RTLB and School-Wide practitioners talked about the value of including RTLB and other learning support colleagues right at the start of PB4L-SW. Bringing these colleagues together will help schools prioritise and have targeted goals within PB4L-SW to meet other needs. Interviewees said where schools had started doing this, it was working really well. They advised integration with other initiatives be aligned at the start.

What results can we see?

37. Narratives³ from students and school staff referenced PB4L-SW as pivotal to inclusion and wellbeing. A strong theme was the experience of being supported and welcomed into the school. Many stories were about a culture of encouragement and the effects of purposeful acknowledgement in helping create a positive school environment.
38. Analysis of Wellbeing@schools (W@S) survey data found no appreciable change over time for aggressive behaviours or equitable relationships in PB4L-SW schools versus non-PB4L-SW schools. Data from 59 PB4L-SW schools was used in this report. For social wellbeing, PB4L-SW seems to have a slight positive-buffer effect in primary schools only. Because the W@S tools are not specifically designed to measure PB4L-SW effects, and the W@S data set included only 59 of the 1000 PB4L-SW schools, it is difficult to tease out the unique effects of PB4L-SW on student outcomes using this data.

³ The stories are not able to provide a representative picture of whether PB4L-SW is achieving its goals, but they illustrate the experiences that students, teachers and whānau value.

Initial findings: focus for the future

With the PB4L School-Wide refresh planned for 2022, these potential next steps can be taken into consideration.

System-level change

39. School-Wide practitioners and RTLB are positive about the value of PB4L. Yet they find it can take a significant effort to bring a whole school and community to understand the principles underpinning PB4L-SW, and to support a shift away from deficit thinking at a systems level.
40. Some of the things they are working against are deeply seated in how people think:
 - Staff are concerned about over-reliance of rewards driving extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, motivation in students
 - There may be tension between the core values of PB4L-SW and whether school staff, and their community, hold these values
 - Some schools are reluctant to use reward systems, which are a central part of PB4L-SW. These schools are using reward systems in different ways (or not at all) depending on their philosophies.
41. There are too few School-Wide practitioners to provide the support needed for some schools and communities to make this shift.
42. Laying the foundations earlier might help. If the core principles of PB4L-SW were taught during teacher training, for example, then many teachers could have a better understanding of PB4L and this could generate support to implement PB4L-SW in more schools.
43. Coaching staff is important and is something that School-Wide practitioners also do – to help staff self-reflect and question their own biases or responses to challenging situations. A socio-cultural lens provides a useful frame for challenging conversations. Having more time to dedicate to reflection, explicit inclusion of socio-cultural theory, and teaching coaching skills to School-Wide practitioners, would help strengthen the quantity and quality of support School-Wide practitioners could provide.

A braided approach needs to be reinforced

44. People talked about the power of more-integrated ways of working, such as working together in integrated teams rather than in silos, which would enable School-Wide practitioners, RTLB and SENCOs to examine School-Wide data together and see what is needed within a classroom or school environment.
45. But there are things at a systems level that work against doing so:
 - Having separate funding for similar supports is problematic – schools sign up to selected initiatives that are viewed as independent of each other and compete for staff time.
 - Learning Support Coordinators are intended to bring a more integrated approach within and across schools but not every school has one

46. To ensure PB4L-SW is implemented and sustained successfully, there needs to be more integration:
- between schools in their clusters, sharing with each other what works in terms of PB4L practice, and
 - between regional Ministry of Education staff such as School-Wide practitioners, RTLB, Education Advisors, and Learning Support staff.
47. Learning Support teams and Education teams working together better with School-Wide Practitioners could enable better support for the sector.

Address the shortage of support at all levels

48. PB4L operates as the universal component within a tiered social-ecological model of support. For the whole ecology to work well, each level needs to function well. School-Wide practitioners, RTLB and schools spoke of the difficulties in supporting challenging students. Long waiting times for individual support can disrupt classroom learning and distract from positive reward structures, placing pressure on the universal level of support.
49. Many of the schools that shared their stories in the SenseMaker process, along with the School-Wide practitioner and RTLB interviews, reiterated that the role of the School-Wide practitioner is to guide, support and motivate schools to stay on track with implementing and sustainably maintaining PB4L-SW. Partnerships with other roles, such as RTLB, also reinforce this supportive environment.
50. School-Wide practitioners are under pressure. Their workload is high, with most supporting around 40 schools, which is well over the 20 schools initially recommended in 2010. This makes it challenging to have ongoing robust discussion with schools.

Address challenges to showing evidence of PB4L effectiveness

51. What works in PB4L School-Wide implementation and maintenance is largely agreed on (for example, strong support from leadership and school staff). Communicating what works will be an important part of the PB4L refresh, or roll-out to more schools.
52. It is challenging to measure holistic interventions like PB4L-SW and corresponding 'soft' outcomes. Using high-level indicators such as the Wellbeing at Schools survey and Ministry attendance and achievement data are typically not nuanced enough to see discernible differences between PB4L and non-PB4L schools. The differences between PB4L and non-PB4L schools are likely to be 'on-the-ground' in the way practice occurs in a school, which is backed up by the SenseMaker narratives.
53. Consideration should be given to how to collect PB4L data in the future. Suggestions include longitudinal studies of students who have attended PB4L-SW schools and have left school, tracking their life-outcomes; as well as PB4L-specific data being collected over time. The refresh in 2022 could be a good time to begin this fresh data collection, with a cohort of schools being selected as a baseline, from which to compare outcomes. Schools could also set their own goals/objectives and data can be collected against these over time, giving schools a reason and a purpose to collect data and to ascertain outcome shifts for individual schools.

Next Steps

54. We will continue to examine the data generated from the remaining school regional workshops (which took place in November) and the final national SenseMaker workshop. These findings will be combined with other data sources. An evaluation report will be ready for your review by the end of February 2022.