Positive Family Support for Middle Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this project?
This project, Positive Family Support, aims to evaluate the effects of adding family support services in middle schools that are currently using systems of school-based behavior management support such as Positive Behavior Support and Safe and Civil Schools.

What is Positive Family Support?
The Positive Family Support Intervention (PFS) includes:

(a) Universal Family Support. A key piece of this intervention is the creation and use of a Family Resource Center housed within the school and supervised by school staff members that we train. The Family Resource Center provides consultations with parents and information on important topics, such as school-wide Positive Behavior Support, parenting skills and additional family resources. We also offer support with developing family outreach, which helps strengthen home-school partnership, and with implementing a parent and teacher screening system to identify students and families in need of support.

(b) Selected Family Support. We have developed a simple program for enhancing parent involvement in selected-level student interventions, such as Check-In/Check-Out. For schools that are not implementing Check-In/Check-Out, our program can still be implemented successfully. In addition to bolstering existing supports, we offer specialized materials for working with families around attendance and homework difficulties.

(c) Tertiary Family Support. We provide training in the Family Check-Up, the core family component to tertiary or ‘indicated’ services, which is designed to assess the specific needs of parents and their children and offer individualized strategies to respond to those needs. The Family Check-Up gives parents tools to help guide and support their adolescents, including proven strategies to prevent youth problem behavior and substance abuse, and to improve academic success. The Family Check-Up provides a flexible menu of options for learning new skills or getting other resources and services as needed. These supports fit well within existing structures of positive behavior management.

Who funds the work?
Oregon Research Institute received funding for this research project from the U.S. Department of Education to implement and evaluate Positive Family Support in eligible middle schools in Oregon. Positive Family Support is designed to offer family support services in middle schools. As a research project, it includes both an intervention and an evaluation component.
What are you evaluating?
Based on our past research, we believe that providing family support services will improve student outcomes. In earlier, smaller-scale studies, this family-centered program, called The Family Check-Up, was shown to prevent and reduce youth problem behavior, substance use and depression while promoting effective parenting, positive youth behaviors and academic success.

This current project allows us to examine how well the program works in middle schools when combined with systems for positive behavior management. We expect that combining our family-centered program with current school-based behavior management systems will produce even more positive results than either one of these supports alone.

How does a school qualify to participate in this program?
Based on the study design we are currently offering this program to schools meeting the following criteria:
- Schools with grades 6, 7 and 8 (including schools that provide grades K-8, and 6-12);
- The school administration has interest in adopting the new system;
- The school has…
  - an average of fifty or more students per middle school grade;
  - a system of positive behavior management (PBS, Safe and Civil Schools…);
  - at least one staff person interested in being trained to help implement the model and willing to be identified as the Parent/Family Liaison;
  - administrative willingness to actively include families;
  - flexibility in designing a discipline response to youth with challenging behavior.

When will this project begin and how long will it last?
If your school agrees to participate, we will flip a coin to decide when your school will receive training in Positive Family Support. All schools will participate in annual surveys and receive remuneration, regardless of their training start date. Schools assigned to the first group will receive training and assistance to set up and deliver Positive Family Support during Year 1 of participation, with the expectation that they will continue to use the program for at least the next three years. Schools in the second group will receive training to implement Positive Family Support in Year 4 of participation. Once school staff has been trained, your school can use the program indefinitely. Our aim is to train and prepare school staff to continue to deliver the program to families long after the project period ends.

What is the training process for Positive Family Support?
Implementing Positive Family Support involves a three-part training process. In the spring of Year 1 or Year 4 (depending on randomized ‘start’ date) our Intervention Training Team will invite all school staff to a two hour workshop designed to provide administrators, teachers and staff with an overview of the Positive Family Support model. This introductory workshop will open a dialogue with school administrators and staff that will help the Positive Family Support staff gather information to aid in tailoring the model to the unique needs and interests of each school. This workshop will also help identify key school personnel who will receive further training. Prior to the beginning of school in the fall, key school staff will receive a two-day training on the Positive Family Support model. We encourage any and all staff that may be interested in implementing this model to attend this workshop. The training activities satisfy Continuing Education requirements, so staff members can receive Professional Development Units (PDUs) for their participation. Following the initial training, ongoing support and consultation will be provided during the implementation period.
In addition to Positive Family Support Training, how much staff time is required?
Following the Initial Workshop and the Positive Family Support Intervention Training, the intervention is not expected to require additional staff time. Positive Family Support is adapted to fit within the current structure of each school. Utilizing personnel already in the roles of working with families, Positive Family Support offers different strategies for engaging families successfully.

Another component of the project is that of evaluation. The evaluation component of the study includes annual surveys of students, teachers, parents and school staff. The student survey will be administered once each winter for the duration of the project. The student survey is designed to be proctored by the classroom teacher and will be about 30 minutes. Teachers and parents will be asked to complete a brief annual evaluation of students and project staff will conduct an annual assessment of current school and family support services.

During the summer, our Positive Family Support project staff will review general school records and student records of students for whom we have parental consent. Project staff may collect data about student grades, attendance, suspensions, expulsions, special education status, standardized test scores, rates of office referrals and about in-school behavior of students in addition to data about parent interactions with schools. These data provide real-life and unbiased measures of students’ academic functioning. We will look to school staff to help facilitate our staff access to general school and student records.

How will you recruit parents and families and what role does the school and administration play?
We will invite parents and students to participate. Project staff will follow students and parents for three years, from 6th grade through 8th grade in two cohorts. Parents and students will be informed that their participation is voluntary and they are free to decline participation. The project will provide training to schools and assess outcomes, but schools select the participants (parents and students) that qualify for intervention and provide the associated services and treatments.

Who participates in the assessments?
Assessments include surveys of students, teachers, school staff and parents. During the summer, project staff will review school records from students for whom parents or guardians have provided consent.

Who receives the information you collect?
Oregon Research Institute and the U.S. Department of Education require a very careful system to protect confidentiality. Only a limited number of project staff members will have access to the data we collect. All data will be reported in aggregate form, without identifying information or individual case reports. Each participating school will receive an annual report containing aggregate data from the student surveys. We will send all participating schools a report at the end of the project, with a summary of the results for all schools. Our goal is not to talk about specific schools but to talk about schools in general.