

Bluum Together: Episode 2- Unpacking Acronym Soup with Katie Azevedo

Intro

Welcome to *Bluum Together*. The Podcast where we cultivate education leadership innovation and impact one conversation at a time. Join us as we learn from visionary leaders who share inspiring stories and uncovered strategies to drive meaningful change in K 12 education.

Mike Caldwell:

All right, good day and welcome back podcast listeners. This is really the second part of our first episode on our overall series that's focusing on mental health support systems in Idaho schools. And I'm back with Katie Azevedo, who is a longtime expert and educator in our Idaho schools. If you missed her introduction, check back with episode one. But we're coming back to kind of add, I would say this is more of an appendix to our first episode that dives into one of the elements that Katie talked about with the six elements of a healthy system zeroing in on healthy systems. Is that accurate? Or systems?

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah, healthy, comprehensive systems, sustainable systems, we could give a lot of descriptive words there.

Mike Caldwell:

Yeah. And an education we're so guilty of creating an acronym for everything seems like everything we you know, that we hear about, like, what can we how can we make that into an acronym or, you know, or start calling something, you know, that doesn't make sense as an acronym, and we just use it as an acronym. And, and so this first part, let's unpack some of these things. So we've talked about *PBIS*, we've talked about *MTSS*. And we haven't really talked much about *ISF*. So those are three good ones to start with. So let's unpack those starting with *PBIS*. What is *PBIS*? And how does that apply to the work that we're doing in schools for supporting students in mental health?

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah, and I think it's, it's such an important conversation that we're aware of the acronyms we're using, and also our audience, because I know they can be really threatening. It's almost like a foreign language. And so with *PBIS*, it's positive behavior, interventions and supports, it's all...

Mike Caldwell:

So, let's slow that down. Positive Behavior, Intervention Supports, okay, *PBIS*.

Katie Azevedo:

PBIS. So we could even go back in time, and it was *PBIS*. So positive behavior supports and that originated at the University of Oregon. So we're really fortunate just in, you know, proximity to where this was founded and how it took off. *PBIS* or *PBS*, they had a legal issue with public broadcasting systems, so they added an I. So if you're coming across things that look, you know, very similar between *PBIS* and *PBS*, they are the same. But back at the University of Oregon, George Sugai, Dr. George Sugai. And Dr. Rob Horner, we're really looking at what we do with some of those students with extremely challenging intense behaviors. So they kind of entered the conversation at the top of the pyramid, if you will, and started working in schools and realized, gosh, if we, if we do some of these elements, or provide some of these components, or support mechanisms for all kids, it really helps. And we're seeing fewer kids with intense behavior. And so what we're doing is good for all and all, meaning all kids and all staff really. So positive behavior supports is a three tiered model, this three tiered model, at the ground level, we kind of call that our green zone universal, there's a lot of different names for the same thing in education, we're really thinking about how are we supporting the behavioral needs of all kids, all meaning all? So at tier one, we're thinking about things like what are our common behavioral expectations, so being respectful, ready to learn, we try to limit those three to five, we found that if you have more than five behavioral expectations, kids only remember, you know, a few, a couple, a handful. And we're thinking about not just identifying what those behavioral expectations are, but we are going to explicitly teach those. So one that we hear all the time, respect, be respectful, but what does that mean? What does that look like? And then also, what are the non examples? With creating the behavioral expectations with explicitly teaching those? Do we need to have them visible around the school and around the community? How are we going to acknowledge staff and students when they're meeting or exceeding those behavioral expectations? And so we want to provide that positive feedback. Sometimes this comes in the way of rewards. I think that kind of has a bad connotation to it. Remember that when we're providing rewards points Positive acknowledgments, whatever you want to call it, that's not the same as bribery. That's very, those are two different things. So we always wanted to find what it is and what it isn't. And then we're also thinking about *PBIS*, for when individuals aren't meeting those expectations, what are some predictable and consistent consequences. And so when we're thinking about consequences, they need to really measure the level of intensity of behavior. So if we have a student that is tapping her pencil, we're probably not going to issue a suspension. And really thinking with staff and working with staff to identify, you know, maybe we have three levels of problem behavior, we have junk behavior, that behavior doesn't really impact anyone, it can just be pretty annoying, really? And so what are some ways that we can respond to junk behavior, and then maybe minor behaviors,

behavior that only impacts that individual student? What are some effective and efficient ways to respond to that type of behavior? So we are creating those environments, as we talked about in the last one, that are consistent, predictable, positive, safe and equitable.

Mike Caldwell:

So these are things that as a school, does training on *PBIS*, it is getting training on how do we collectively consistently handle these levels of behavior, challenges, and then we go to these levels, and so that there is some consistency there, that what you're talking about?

Katie Azevedo:

Absolutely. And one thing that you really brought up that's so important is that *PBIS* isn't a scripted curriculum or a package, it's merely a set of frameworks, and you can go to pbis.org, all of this information is free, they have great implementation blueprints. But really, you know, two schools can be implementing *PBIS* with fidelity, and it could look very different. But these core elements are in place, I think that's what's key. As

Mike Caldwell:

you're talking about this, you know, what we talked about before, in our first episode, together, were those six elements to a healthy system, we talked about common language and in the systems that we're zeroing in on right now, we talked about positive relationships and a safe environment. And the last one was self care. I'm really think, you know, as you're talking about, this is like, man, there's a lot of inner connectedness here, because really, when you're talking about these consistent practices, you're also at the same time, creating that healthy, safe environment, and also contributes to positive relationships. It's, it's, you're, you're doing more than just building the systems here, you're also creating that safe environment. So when students have that consistency, and they know what's expected of them. And they also are aware of consistent consequences that creates that culture and that climate of being safe and also contributes to those positive relationships. Would you agree with that? Absolutely.

Katie Azevedo:

And you can see where if we are creating an environment that is rich with these things, we're also supporting the mental health of all the stakeholders involved. And so *PBIS* is researched and researched and researched. And you can find all of those data points, but you know, we're seeing an improvement of positive behavior, we're seeing an improvement of academic outcomes. If we have students that are able to behave appropriately and engage in instruction, we're gonna see, you know, some great, some great elements of support as far as academic outcomes. We're also seeing staff retention improve, we're seeing schools that are able to get

substitutes to show up and work. So there's a lot of it, you know, it really does go to a healthier system. Absolutely.

Mike Caldwell:

Yeah. Okay, so *PBIS*, positive behavior intervention support. *MTSS*.

Katie Azevedo:

Okay. One item I want to add to the *PBIS*. And it's the final item, and it's crucial, is database decision making. And so I think we're really good at collecting data, we're not always as good at using data. And we're better at collecting academic data and looking at that, and you know, having it inform our practices, but we want to do the same as far as behavior. So really looking at things we already have available like attendance, tardiness, suspensions, expulsions, but we also want to look back to those consistent and predictable consequences. How much junk behavior are we seeing, what can we do about that? how much minor or major behavior that's affecting others in the environment. That data is what's going to drive our actions. We also want to know, were we seeing behavior issues at what level. Are we seeing behavior issues at a certain grade level? How about a certain time of day so that data piece is huge and that data piece kind of carries us over to *MTSS*. So *MTSS* is a multi-tiered systems of support. It is the same framework as *PBIS*. I hear some people say Oh, well, *PBIS* is like the behavior side of *MTS* and *MTSS*. And I'll caution you that the *PBIS* gurus get really angry because they say, Well, if you're doing *PBIS*, well, you're also positively impacting academic outcomes. So I would say that *MTSS* is more of a generic framework, but where we're being really intentional with what our academic supports and our behavioral supports. And that brings us to such a crucial topic, the connection between academic outcomes and behavior. So we know the chicken and the egg cross the road together, if we look at the research, we know that those students with really intense behavioral issues, 94% of them also have academic issues. And the older they get, the higher the correlation. And so really, we can't just divide out, you know, and have a conversation around what's the behavior we're saying? And then a totally different group of educators talking about, well, how are they doing academically, we've got to look at the whole child. So that really kind of brings in *MTSS*. And we want to think about at tier one, what are we doing for all kids at tier two? What are we doing for some kids in small groups? So that is usually the tier that we skip, we get tier one in place, what are we doing for all kids, and then there's a fire and we jump in with individualized support, which is tier three. So we really want to think about the power of creating small groups. So maybe we're creating some small groups where kids are checking in with adults periodically throughout the day and setting goals, maybe we're pulling kids together for who've experienced recent grief, and they can come together and lean on each other, or executive functioning skills is another one. And then again, at tier three, our most intense behavior needs academic issues. And we want to, we want to know

truly who those kids are. So we can save those resources for who needs those resources. So at tier one, if we're doing it well, we should be reaching the needs and *MTSS*. That's academically and behaviorally 80 to 90% of our students, tier two, roughly 15% of our students should need those services, and only 1 to 5% of our students should really be considered to need tier three. One other thing to consider, we don't have tier one kids, tier two kids or tier three kids, we have, we want to label the need, not the student, because we may have a student who needs some tier two supports academically for you know, a few months, and then that core curriculum is enough. And they're proficient and they're thriving.

Mike Caldwell:

And so when you talk about the tiers of intervention and support, you're using those tiers, as you're talking about both *PBIS* the positive behavior intervention support, as well as the multi tiered system of support, which is the tiers. Is that how you would maybe elaborate a little bit on the *MTSS*, then as it relates to the

Katie Azevedo:

tiers, yes, same framework, same triangle with, if we're truly doing *MTSS* as it's designed to be done, we're incorporating our academic supports and interventions as well as our behavior.

Mike Caldwell:

Great. So what are some examples from the *MTSS* framework? Or that model that you would think about in terms of tier one, tier two? And tier three? You so are we talking specifically to on the academic aspect of things when we talk about *MTSS*

Katie Azevedo:

and behavior? Both behavior? Both? Okay, yeah. So at tier one, and I've seen where in each school again, this is a framework, it's not a scripted program or curriculum. So, you know, each school being so different in Idaho, you create it based on your contextual needs. But we've had teams that have gone through, let's say, *PBIS* training, and they realize that, gosh, we have an *RTI* team, that is essentially only talking about academics, and we're small and rural. And we're pretty much the same team here at this *PBIS* training. Let's combine efforts. Let's talk about what we are going to do for all kids on the academic side and the behavior side? And then from there, we can build up what we are going to do in small groups? And then individualized.

Mike Caldwell:

Perfect, thank you. Yeah, anything else you would elaborate on on *PBIS* or *MTSS*? Before we switch to *ISF*, their acronym?

Katie Azevedo:

I'm just that those proportions are really important. And we don't know those proportions unless we have clean, valid, reliable data. So we need that data to inform our system. I've gone into schools where their pyramid feels upside down where they feel like they have to individualize everything for every kid because all the needs are so unique. That's really a tier one of our core problems. We need to go back to what we are doing for all kids? I've also been in schools where it looks more like a column and that's really tough, you know, to be providing support in tier one for all kids. And then a third of the kids also need tier two and another third also need tier three. So it just helps us to organize our instruction, our interventions, our efforts. Yeah.

Mike Caldwell:

Is there a standard or of some sort that feels normal? I don't know if normal is the right name as we think about the proportions of students that might need tier two supports versus tier three supports? Is there a kind of standard that is kind of something that we should be expecting in a school?

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah, I would say we could view it as a goal really, to have 15, roughly 15% of our students only needing tier two, and then only one to 5% of our students really needing that intensive individualized intervention at tier three. And that again, if we're talking *MTSS*, we're thinking academically and behaviorally. Yeah. Okay.

Mike Caldwell:

Thank you for that. Let's talk about *ISF Interconnected Systems Framework*. Did I get that right?

Katie Azevedo:

You did.

Mike Caldwell:

Okay. What is that framework?

Katie Azevedo:

You know, I always hear gosh, we're going through initiative, fatigue, there's so many new initiatives. And at times, I feel like we're going through framework fatigue, because there's all these different frameworks, but really, they're talking the same thing. And so this is really created by some of our *PBIS* gurus. And what they realized and implemented *PBIS*, for the last, you know, almost 30 years, is that it really does promote the well being of students and staff in

mental health of students and staff. But we could be more intentional. And so it's taking that same three level pyramid, that same tiered pyramid and thinking about what we can do specific to mental health concerns with a system and a framework we already have in place. So we don't want to do something totally new, just to support the mental health needs. We're going to take what we already have and leverage it. So that's essentially the Interconnected Systems Framework.

Mike Caldwell:

Okay. And there's four elements to it. Talk about that? What are those four elements?

Katie Azevedo:

The first element is really that one that I just mentioned, and it's the power and having a single mechanism of delivery. So, you know, typically, I think research says that schools have about 14 to 26 initiatives going at the same time, and they're not all done very well, because we're spread so thin. So rather than doing something different, we're going to take what we already have and think about what we are going to do for the mental health concerns of all kids at tier one? What can we provide in a small group at tier two and then individualized at tier three, so we're taking that single delivery system, and we're kind of just beefing it up, so that we're really targeting mental health needs?

Mike Caldwell:

Okay. So when you talk about kind of the first element being a single mechanism of delivery, you're talking about really the pyramid that we've been focusing on when we talked about *PBIS* and *MTSS*, and that is, tier one supports tier two supports tier three supports. What we're talking about specifically for *ISF* are connected systems framework, is that specific to mental health supports, while *PBIS* is specific to behavior *MTSS* is more specific maybe to academic support. Is *ISF*, more specific to mental health supports.

Katie Azevedo:

Yes, and no. The approach I like to take is, we want to have the strongest system we can to support student needs. And to do that we want to look at their academic needs, their behavior needs, their mental health needs. And so again, *ISF* was created to really help with that mental health component because it can no longer be ignored. And we already have our framework, we already have those elements at play with *PBIS*, or *MTSS*. So you should have a leadership team that's meeting at least monthly, you can lean into those behavioral expectations. And I can give you an example of that. You should also be responding consistently, whether that's to really great behavior, or maybe some behavior that needs some work or some mental health concerns. And then that data collection piece is huge. And so if we're looking to see if we're

collecting data on behavior, that's also going to inform us of the mental health status of a lot of our students. And then maybe we're gonna go a step further with Interconnected Systems Framework and do some more like mental health behavioral screeners. So some of those kids with more internalizing behaviors are able to pick up on them before you know their needs intensify.

Mike Caldwell:

Great. Okay. Thank you. So, you mentioned the four elements. Did I miss the second one?

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah. So you didn't miss it. So the second one, all Students need access to mental health support. And this is really the power of that Tijuana *ISF*, what are we truly doing for all students. And a great example of *ISF* or trauma informed care or mental health supports, you could call it many things at tier one. If you're implementing tier one of *PBIS*, you most likely have a behavior matrix, which is really going to outline those three to five expectations, and then the different locations in your school. And so this is a prime example of you creating your framework based on your context. So the matrix at the elementary school is going to look much different than the high school elementary, you know, you're going to have those expectations. And then you're going to look at how respectful you are, ready to learn in the hallway, on the playground, in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and really pointing out what that looks like. So I'm going to show respect in the hallway, by walking on the right side of the hall, I'm going to be respectful and responsible in the lunchroom by, you know, following the protocol of cleaning up my lunch tray. At the high school level, though, maybe we're going to have locations like locker room parking lots, different places like that, and all schools are unique. So they all have their, you know, unique element as far as a location. One thing though, we can do if we're more kind of centered around *ISF*, really thinking of how we can beef this up to better support the mental health needs of students, I've seen a lot of schools add a column. So to those locations, it's not really a location, but it's when I feel upset. So when I feel upset, I can show respect by and then we're explicitly teaching that I can be responsible by, I can show that I'm ready to learn even though I'm upset by doing this. And so we're really teaching those kind of self regulation, calming skills. How do we get back to that upstairs kind of thriving brain in order to engage in learning?

Mike Caldwell:

Great. What's number three?

Katie Azevedo:

Number three is access is not enough in this one I love because impact defines success. So think about all the things we do in education, where we're not necessarily monitoring the outcome. It's more of a checklist. So yep, we've got that in place, check it off. *ISF* pushes us a little bit further, where we're looking at, yes, we're doing that. Is it working? Do we need to keep doing it? Do we need to do something differently? And here's how we know based on student outcomes.

Mike Caldwell:

Great. So the first one was a single mechanism of delivery, if that's accurate. The second one was that all students need access to mental health support.

Katie Azevedo:

And some need more, and some need a whole lot more.

Mike Caldwell:

Yes. And that gets into the tiers that we've been talking about. And then there is not enough. I like that. What's number four,

Katie Azevedo:

Number four, and it's kind of one we hit on at the beginning, it's that we're able to utilize those core features of *MTSS* and *PBIS* that we already have in place. So if we're doing *PBIS*, or *MTSS* with fidelity, we have a leadership team. We have rich data that we're using to drive decisions. We're also reaching out beyond campus to families and communities so we can really leverage those efforts that we already have in place, rather than doing something drastically different.

Mike Caldwell:

Great. Okay, so to review, four core elements of an Interconnected Systems Framework, single mechanism of delivery, all students need access to mental health access is not enough for using, I'll have you paraphrase the last one.

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah, the core features of that multi-tiered system.

Mike Caldwell:

Okay, great. What would you say? And what's your feel or knowledge of how many are percentage wise of our districts that you are aware of? Have these systems in place already?

Katie Azevedo:

That's a really difficult question. And the reason I say that I work with schools all the time, where they're like, oh, yeah, we've you know, we went to that *PBIS* training 10 years ago, and we have posters. Well, that's not truly, you know, alive and thriving within your culture, your expectations, not everyone knows them. You're not explicitly teaching those. We're not acknowledging kids for great behavior. We're not responding consistently. And there's no data in place. So no, you're not doing *PBIS*.

Mike Caldwell:

It's not a checklist item. Where You say, we've, we did it, you know, we're done. It's an ongoing process. You're always doing it,

Katie Azevedo:

you live it. Yep. And then your Plan, Do, Check, Act. because we always are gonna have new kids, new staff, new families, new administrators. And so really looking at the system.

Mike Caldwell:

Did you say Plan, Do, Check, Act?

Katie Azevedo:

Yes.

Mike Caldwell:

You just blew right through that!

Katie Azevedo:

Sorry!

Mike Caldwell:

Slow down on that.

Katie Azevedo:

Okay. Yeah, so we're never there. That's like good news, bad news, right? That we're never going to just like you said, check it off our list that we're always revisiting it, revising it, and refreshing it.

Mike Caldwell:

It's important, I guess, awareness. And you know, to our audience that is listening if you are in a school, it's kind of a self-reflection. Where are you? I mean, are you? Are you just checking the box and saying we've done it? Are you struggling because maybe you need a refresher? And you need to kind of come back to the basics of these these things and do that self-reflection, where are you really, if you're struggling and going back to kind of the proportionality of where the support is, if you're really feeling top heavy on tier three, and maybe a sign that you need to regroup and think about your systems?

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Mike Caldwell:

So what about I mean, those schools that are listening, school leaders that are listening, say, Okay, I need a refresher, I need to regroup on this. What are some resources for them that you would point them to to get that support back into their, their school or their district?

Katie Azevedo:

Yeah. And I think like, as far as leadership team training for your *PBIS* leadership team, or your *MTSS*, *ISF*, whatever you want to call it, it's not just a one time thing, because you are gonna have turnover within your team. And then also thinking about, how are we going to gain training, or, you know, maybe they don't need a four day intensive tear one Institute, but all staff need to know why we're doing what we're doing. So going back to that, pbis.org has some really great resources. Results Learning Center offers two online on demand courses, they'll be following up with several courses on trauma informed care, and look at the other schools that are successful, I think we can learn so much from each other. One thing I want to mention too, in those schools that say they're doing it, but they're not we also have schools that don't know they're doing it. They're just doing best practice. And so a lot of times I'll walk into a school and you know, they have their expectations. They're teaching those they're thriving, it's a community, they're very much focused on building positive relationships. And I'll ask them, oh, what *PBIS* training did you go to? And they'll look at me like I'm crazy. We've never been to a *PBIS* training. They're just best practice. So there's two sides to that coin.

Mike Caldwell:

Yeah, a very good point. Glad you mentioned that. So Katie, one as we kind of conclude our two episodes together, is there anything else that you didn't mention that you'd like to share? Before we wrap this up?

Katie Azevedo:

Just how much I appreciate the educators out there, both certified and classified. We're all in it together. And also families, we're community members, we all are after one thing, and I think it's to set up our kids for success. And so I just appreciate the hard, hard work that is being done. And those that are, you know, trying to reach different stakeholders, so we can have a more comprehensive conversation,

Mike Caldwell:

Yeah, like we said. And thank you for saying that, like we said at the beginning, this is a high priority topic. It's very complex. And it's not getting any easier. It's getting more difficult. And so yeah, it's an all-in approach. And we need everybody at the table and rowing in the right direction or rowing in the same direction, and helping our youth. So yeah, great summary. And I appreciate you saying that, Katie, if any of our listeners have questions, we can include maybe your emails on our website so people can reach out to you if they have further questions from you. And with that, we will conclude today's episode, which is just one of several conversations that we're going to have on supporting youth mental health in Idaho school. So once again, Katie, thank you for your time and your expertise. And thank you to our listeners for tuning in. And please join us for our next episode. Thank you.

Katie Azevedo:

Thank you.

Outro

Thank you for joining us to explore education, leadership, innovation and impact here on *Bluum Together*. We encourage you to continue these dialogues in your communities, classrooms and organizations. Be sure to visit bluum.org/together where you can discover more episodes or click Join the conversation, if you'd like to be a guest. Until next time, keep learning, keep Bluuming, and keep making an impact one conversation at a time.