Part 3 of 3

Providing Support for Intervention Implementation

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This final installment of a three-part series on intervention fidelity highlights the importance of ensuring classroom supports are implemented as intended, explores common barriers to high-quality implementation, and highlights how implementer support can improve student outcomes.

ALL INTERVENTIONS—whether academic, behavioral, or social–emotional—should be consistently delivered as planned to realize desired student outcomes. In other words, they should be delivered with fidelity. Although school psychologists may understand the benefit of high levels of intervention fidelity, in practice, school-based interventions are often implemented at low levels (Cochrane et al., 2019; Collier-Meek, Sanetti, Levin, et al., 2019). School psychologists can address this concern by monitoring fidelity and providing support for intervention implementation. In the previous two installments of this series, we defined intervention fidelity (Collier-Meek et al., 2024) and highlighted the importance of obtaining sufficient levels of fidelity to accurately interpret student data and improve outcomes (Pierce et al., 2024). We provided guidance for measuring intervention fidelity, emphasizing a multimethod approach that accounts for the key intervention components. In this final installment, we identify common reasons that interventions are not implemented with fidelity and share implementation supports that can be provided by school psychologists.

Barriers to Fidelity

There are many reasons an implementer might struggle to consistently deliver an intervention or need support (Collier-Meek, Sanetti, & Boyle, 2019). In some cases, an intervention fails to fit within existing classroom environment, established routines, curricular demands, or preferred instructional methods. For example, if the steps of an intervention take too much time or disrupt the flow of lessons, teachers may be less likely to use them.

In other cases, inadequate intervention fidelity could be related to an implementer's preparation for or skill in delivering the intervention. For example, teachers may not fully understand steps of the intervention or lack confidence in their ability to execute them.

Finally, resource constraints can impact fidelity if an intervention requires specific materials or resources that are not readily available. For instance, a math intervention that involves the use of specific manipulatives may not be feasible without such materials.

To address these and other barriers, school psychologists can apply their consultation skills to provide universal and targeted implementation supports. Researchers have conceptualized intervention implementation supports in a multitiered systems of support (MTSS) framework (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2019), given that educators present with different levels and types of need.

Universal Intervention Implementation Supports

Some support strategies are beneficial to all implementers when an intervention is introduced. These strategies can be integrated into consultation or MTSS team meetings. Implementation planning, direct training, and intervention manuals or scripts are three low-intensity, evidence-based supports.

Implementation Planning

In implementation planning, the school psychologist and teacher collaborate to (a) identify the logistics of an intervention and adapt it to suit the classroom context (i.e., action planning), and (b) identify potential implementation barriers and generate solutions to address them (i.e., coping planning). Coupling implementation planning with direct training is associated with improved intervention delivery and student outcomes (Sanetti et al., 2015) and has been endorsed by teachers as a socially valid method of supporting intervention fidelity.

Consider Jordan, a third-grader who struggles to stay on task in the classroom. To support their teacher's use of a behavior support plan (BSP) that includes proactive breaks, periodic reminders of expected behaviors, and a token economy, the school psychologist could engage in implementation planning. For the token economy, the action planning stage may sound like:

> *School psychologist:* "Let's make sure we're aligned on the details of this intervention so you can use it with confidence. It says here, 'After math and reading, review Jordan's stickers with them.' Can we revise this to make it more feasible in your classroom?"
>
> *Teacher:* "It would fit better with our schedule to do this after snack and lunch."
>
> *School psychologist:* "Let's make that change. Next, let's walk through the details of this step to see how it will fit into your classroom context. Where will you implement this step? Do you need any resources?"
>
> *Teacher:* "I will meet them at their desk. I should have everything I need."

Direct Training

Through direct training, the teacher practices the skills that are needed to deliver an intervention with fidelity. A school psychologist reviews the intervention steps and the rationale for them, then models how each

step can be used in the classroom. Next, the teacher practices implementation and receives positive and corrective feedback until they fully understand how to use each step. Direct training is effective with a range of interventions, implementers, and students (Fallon et al., 2018).

Consider what direct training looks like for Jordan's BSP step related to proactive breaks:

> *School psychologist*: "Preventive strategies, such as providing Jordan proactive breaks, sets them up for success by giving them a chance to take a break from academic tasks at regular, predictable times. This reduces the likelihood of them engaging in off-task behavior to escape the task. I might approach Jordan privately and say, 'Jordan, before we get started on math you can take a 2-minute coloring break at your desk.' How might you use this step?"
>
> *Teacher:* "I'll let them use the cool down corner for breaks. I would say, 'Jordan, before we transition to centers you can take a break in the cool down corner.'"
>
> *School psychologist:* "That sounds great! I like how you used a specific space in your classroom and timed it with the transition. I might also mention the 2-minute time limit so that Jordan understands the expectation that breaks are quick."

Written Intervention Tools

Manuals or scripts can be helpful when introducing a new intervention. A manual contains a detailed description of the intervention and all relevant components. Intervention scripts refer to written instructions for intervention steps. Depending on the intervention, scripts (which are shorter) may be more feasible and acceptable to teachers. However, some teachers may prefer comprehensive manuals, which are available for some packaged interventions.

The following is a sample script for the preventive strategies on Jordan's BSP:

- **Step 1.** Provide positive attention to Jordan three times per academic block. DO: Approach Jordan privately. Give a thumbs up/high-five or assist with the activity.
- **Step 2.** When unavailable, inform Jordan of the next check-in and offer a preferred task while they wait. SAY: "I am helping another math center; I'll check in in 15 minutes. You can work with a partner while I'm gone."
- **Step 3.** Remind all students of expected classroom behaviors. SAY: "Remember, in the hallway we keep our hands to ourselves and voices off."

Intensifying Intervention Implementation Supports

Even after evidence-based universal intervention implementation supports, some teachers may benefit from more help. In general, there are two patterns of fidelity data that may help guide decision making about how to intensify support (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2019).

The first pattern might show: (a) overall fidelity begins at a low level and stays low, or (b) certain intervention steps are not implemented. This pattern is consistent with a skill deficit, or a "can't do" problem. To address a skill deficit, a school psychologist might provide additional direct training (reviewed above), role play (modeling and practice of particularly challenging scenarios), or participant modeling (modeling and practice with the student in the implementation context).

The second pattern might show: (a) fidelity starting off high and decreasing over time or (b) inconsistent or variable implementation. In this case, the data suggest a performance deficit, or a "won't do" problem. Evidence-based strategies to address a performance deficit include motivational interviewing and performance feedback.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a strategy that focuses on the teacher's perceptions of the intervention and the goals of implementing it for the student. A school psychologist may use four types of motivational interviewing skills to demonstrate the importance of implementing a new intervention to achieve their goals, as well as reinforcing the teacher's self-efficacy in implementing the intervention (Collier-Meek, Sanetti, Levin, et al., 2019).

Asking open-ended questions allows the implementer to express their perspectives so that the school psychologist can uncover insights and highlight their interest in the intervention. For instance asking, "Can you share your thoughts about how the BSP might benefit Jordan?"

In their response, school psychologists can *highlight change talk* or reflective statements that show the implementer's openness to or desire for change. A school psychologist may say, "It's clear you care about Jordan's progress in your class." Such a statement not only builds rapport with the implementer, but it also reinforces their commitment to the intervention.

School psychologists can *use statements of affirmation* to acknowledge the teacher's skills and actions to build on their past successes and motivate them to use the intervention. For example, school psychologists may say, "You have already made such an effort to support Jordan. Your dedication to helping them improve will greatly contribute to the success of this intervention."

Lastly, *summarizing statements* can connect the teacher's goals to a change in their behavior (i.e., implementation). Summarizing conversations in a way that connects these goals to the required change can reinforce the alignment between the teacher's desires and the objectives of the intervention, increasing buy-in and collaboration. A school psychologist could say, "I understand that you would like Jordan to improve their classroom behavior. Implementing this intervention effectively is a key step towards that goal."

Each of these motivational interviewing techniques can help school psychologists engage with educators in a supportive and purposeful manner to foster a shared commitment to implementation.

Performance Feedback

Performance feedback is an evidence-based support that involves presenting verbal and graphed feedback on intervention implementation and highlighting the link between these data and student outcomes. After collecting and graphing intervention fidelity data, a school psychologist can briefly meet with the teacher to review the graphed data, provide corrective feedback for intervention steps not implemented as planned, and give praise for the steps implemented fully. The school psychologist may also share additional information on the rationale behind omitted intervention steps or even model and practice them to increase the teacher's level of commitment or buy-in to implementing those steps.

While collecting intervention fidelity data, the school psychologist should also capture student data. Analyzing and graphing the student's response to the intervention can be used in performance feedback sessions to help the teacher connect high fidelity to the intervention with better

student outcomes. Performance feedback has been shown to effectively improve teachers' intervention fidelity when delivered in person as well as via email (Fallon et al., 2015).

For example, a school psychologist may write, "Thank you for welcoming me into your classroom today. I saw many wonderful things happening and saw you consistently implementing preventive strategies that helped keep Jordan on track! I noticed some missed opportunities for behavior-specific praise, which can reinforce Jordan engaging in positive behaviors so they are more likely to occur. How can I support you with this step?"

Takeaways

To address implementation barriers, school psychologists are encouraged to use evidence-based universal support (i.e., implementation planning, direct training, written intervention tools) with all teachers when introducing new interventions. For teachers requiring additional support, practitioners can evaluate what type of support is needed (i.e., skill or performance deficit) and intensify support accordingly to ensure that teachers' unique needs are met, and students experience high-quality intervention delivery that is more likely to lead to improved outcomes. ●

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