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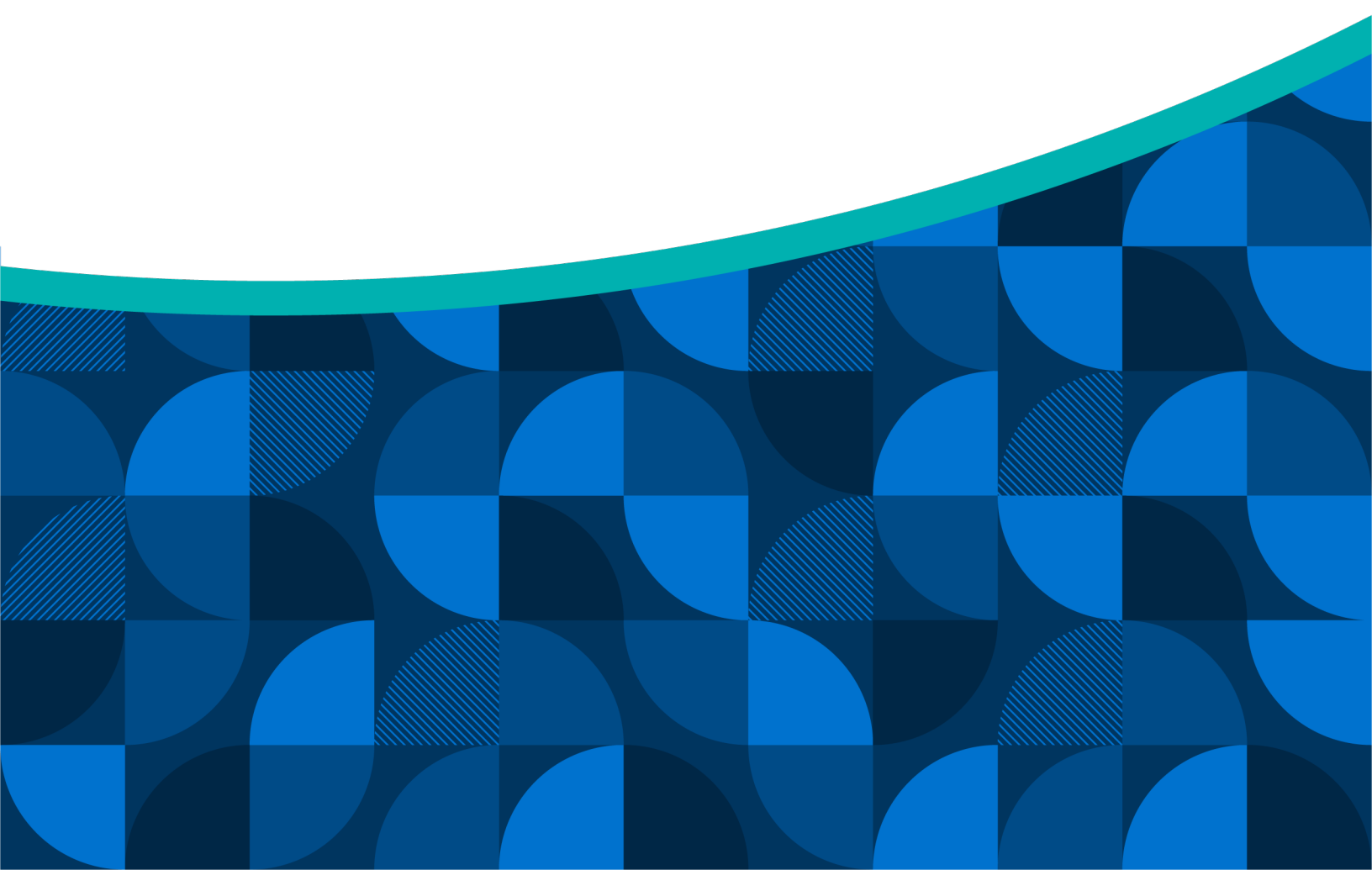
Building A Better Behavior Management Strategy for Students *and* Teachers

Key Findings from EAB's Student Behavior Survey

District Leadership Forum

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Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive

Proven Solutions for K-12's Current, Critical Challenges

Student Success

Unlock Student Success
- Student Behavior
- Early Literacy
- Student Mental Health

Employee Experience

Re-Imagine the Employee Experience
- Teacher and Staff Morale
- Principal Hiring and Development
- Employee Recruitment and Retention

Community Confidence

Strengthen Community Confidence
- Parent and Community Buy-In
- Flashpoint Management
- District Communications

About EAB and the District Leadership Forum

The District Leadership Forum helps district leaders identify and implement proven solutions to current, critical challenges.

Through our research, events, and advisory services we provide superintendents and their teams with expert guidance as well as hands-on support to make meaningful change in their districts.

180+
Districts in the District Leadership Forum

37
States represented

600 – 180k
Students per district we serve

Learn how the District Leadership Forum can help your district achieve its goals at eab.com/k12

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About the Survey

Methodology

The 2022-2023 Student Behavior Survey was distributed online from October 14 to November 1.

A total of 1,109 educators from across 42 states (including DC) and more than 60 districts completed the survey, which was designed to provide current superintendents with data about the experiences, needs, and perspectives of their teachers, administrators, and staff.

District administrators, school administrators, teachers, and student support staff participated in the survey.

The survey instrument assessed respondents' perspectives on:

- Levels of concern over student behavior today

- Understanding of implementation barriers of successful behavior management and SEL approaches

- Most common behavior management approaches and their efficacy

- Current needs for additional implementation support

Profile of Respondents

■ Locations of Survey Respondents (n=1,109)
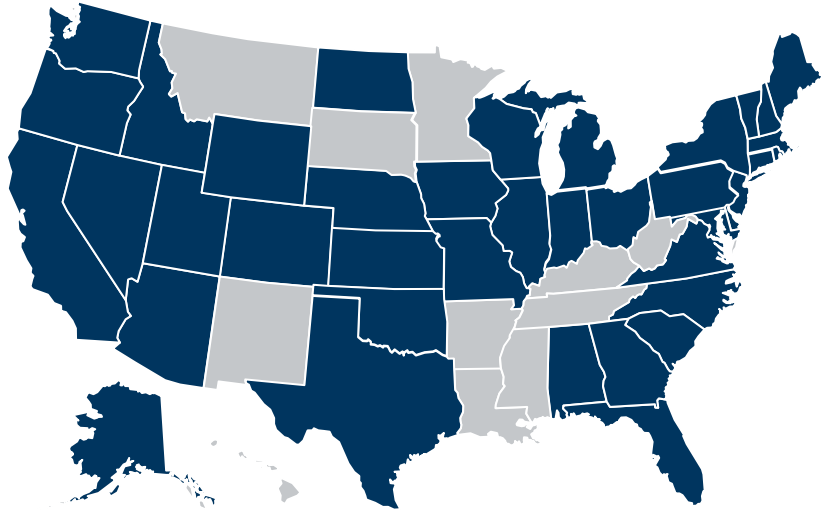
Respondent Role

District Admin.	School Admin.	Teacher	Student Support	Other District Staff
13.5%	13%	52%	12%	10%

Years of Experience in Education

≥5 years	5–10 years	11–15 years	16–20 years	21–25 years	26–30 years	30+ years
16%	17%	14%	19%	15%	14%	6%

District Size

Small (< 2,500 students)	Medium (2,500–9,999 students)	Large (>10,000 students)
22%	41%	37%

Grade Level

Elementary (pK–5)	Middle School (6–8)	High School (9–12)	Multiple (pK–12)
37%	16%	11%	36%

Community Type

Urban	Suburban	Town	Rural
22%	41%	19%	19%

Source: EAB data, interviews and analysis.

Executive Summary

In the 2018–2019 school year, school districts across the country raised alarms about an epidemic unrelated to COVID-19: an increase in student behavioral concerns. In response, EAB conducted a survey of thousands of educators and school district administrators to learn more about the scale of this concern. We found that educators agreed—student behavioral disruptions had increased, and surveyed teachers estimated losing nearly two and a half hours of learning time each week as a result of behavioral disruptions.

EAB research uncovered that while school districts already had many best practice behavior management programs (i.e., Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), socio-emotional learning (SEL) curricula), school administrators needed support to implement these programs more effectively to achieve results. In response, EAB identified 15 ways to accelerate program implementation, primarily focused on prevention through deploying early intervention techniques and behavior data collection.

Less than a year later, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and districts were forced to put behavior management concerns on hold. In the spring of 2020, most school districts closed their doors and prioritized feeding students, providing virtual instruction, and becoming public health experts. Often this work was at the expense of moving forward with their efforts related to student behavior. As a result, progress on effectively managing student behavior has been slow, stagnant, or in many cases, gotten worse.

As schools across the country returned to conducting in-person classes, supporting students behaviorally and creating a positive school environment became even more challenging than it had been in 2019. The pandemic exacerbated existing mental health concerns among children due to disruptions in routines, increased social isolation, and heightened stress and anxiety. And because student learning has also suffered in the aftermath of the pandemic, school districts have prioritized academics, often at the expense of students' behavioral, social, and emotional well-being.

In 2022, EAB launched another survey to better understand educators' perspectives on the new challenges that schools face when it comes to student behavior today. The survey confirmed the narrative—educators nationwide agree that student behavioral concerns have gotten even more worrisome since the 2018–2019 school year. Eighty-four percent of all respondents agree that students' behavioral skills are developmentally behind students of the same age from two years ago. Seventy-seven percent of all respondents agree that student behavior is one of their top concerns this year (up from 61 percent prior to the pandemic). The survey data also shows that students' relationships with each other and adults have gotten increasingly fraught with reported increases in bullying, violence, and opposition since 2018.

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> **See pages 9–11 for more details on the state of student behavior collected from EAB's 2022-23 survey.**

Source: EAB data, interviews and analysis.

Executive Summary

While districts are implementing many of the best practices EAB identified in 2019 to address student behavior, districts are now facing a new barrier: teachers are struggling more today than they were prior to the pandemic. For EAB, this comes as no surprise. We have spent the past several years helping districts better support their teachers and improve teacher morale. Our partnership with dozens of districts has made it clear that student behavior is a key underlying driver of low morale. And low teacher morale negatively impacts academic instruction, behavior management, and teachers' willingness to stay in the profession. This makes it crucial for district leaders not to only better support students but also to better support the teachers charged with much of the hard work to support students' behavioral, mental, and socio-emotional health.

EAB's survey also surfaced four barriers that districts must address to improve behavior management:

- Teachers identified that there are not enough support staff to assist with behavior management (e.g., behavior specialists, school psychologists, instructional aides).

- Teachers note a disconnect between teachers and administration on how and when to follow behavior management frameworks.

- Teachers perceive a lack of adequate training on how to implement behavior management techniques.

- Teachers feel pressure to prioritize academic curriculum over behavior management and feel there isn't enough time for both.

For more data on these four barriers and how they underline the fact that teachers feel unsupported when it comes to student behavior, see pages 12–15.

The more we hear from educators, one thing becomes clearer: school districts are program rich but impact poor when it comes to student behavior management. Why? Districts focus on the latest and greatest tools rather than training teachers how to use those tools to achieve a desired goal. Unfortunately, the acronym of a program inspires few to act. A checklist of fidelity measures? Probably even less so. For success, leaders need more than just a new, shiny program to inspire results. Districts' behavior management toolbox is quite full, but the problem is no one is sure what exactly they are trying to build with it.

District leaders must better support educators to effectively manage student behavior by telling them not what strategies to use but showing them why and how to use them. Behavior science tells us that for people to implement "what" you want them to do, three prerequisites must be met: they must understand what to do, must be motivated to do it, and must be capable of doing it successfully. When it comes to behavior management, district leaders are not fulfilling these requirements. To build a better behavior management strategy, district leaders need to start by defining their goal: creating conditions for positive student behavior.

Source: EAB data, interviews and analysis.

Need Help Building a Better Behavior Management Strategy?

Join EAB This Spring at Our Executive Roundtable

At the Executive Roundtable for Superintendents, discover how to overcome the biggest barriers facing school districts when it comes to behavior management and how to create the conditions for positive student behavior in your schools. During this research-driven presentation and facilitated discussion, district leaders will learn how to:

- Define the research-backed key conditions required to decrease student behavioral concerns;
- Diagnose the shortcomings in their existing behavior management strategy, so they can target their resources more effectively and efficiently;
- Use teacher-approved solutions to achieve the environmental conditions districts must create for students to thrive behaviorally; and
- Develop an ongoing system of support that makes building a better behavior management strategy simple.

What can you do right now to create the conditions for positive student behavior?

Districts need to understand their own barriers. They need a pulse on their teachers' and staffs' perspectives on behavior management—what does your staff need and what is making this work harder? Hear from your staff on their biggest barriers to behavior management by asking these four questions (see below) now. We encourage you to bring those answers to the Executive Roundtable this spring.

- Do your educators feel there is a lack of staff and resources to support teachers in effectively managing student behaviors?
- Are administrators across the district or school presenting a consistent message on how and when to use the district's behavior management strategies?
- Is there adequate training on how to implement behavior management techniques?
- Do your educators feel pressured to prioritize moving forward with the academic curriculum rather than focusing on behavior management?

Want to learn more about implementing behavior management strategies in your district? Contact us at eab.com/k12.

Source: EAB data, interviews and analysis.

State of Student Behavior

2022–2023 School Year

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Student Behavior Is a Top Concern for All Educators

As students return to schools following the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, EAB's 2022 survey data reflects educators' increasing concern over student behavior since 2018. Research shows that student behavioral concerns prevent progress on pandemic recovery efforts—from academics to teacher morale—making this an urgent concern for district leaders to address.

Students Are Developmentally Behind

84%

of all respondents agree students are developmentally behind in self-regulation and relationship-building compared to students two years ago.

Behavioral Disruptions Have Increased

68%

of all respondents agree their concerns about student behavior have increased since the 2019–2020 school year.

78% of Teachers Identify Student Behavior as a Top Concern

Percentage of Respondents Who Agreed That "Right now, student behavior is one of my top five concerns"

District Admin: 70% (2022), 53% (Pre-pandemic)
School Admin: 81% (2022), 70% (Pre-pandemic)
Teachers: 78% (2022), 57% (Pre-pandemic)
Support Staff: 79% (2022), 66% (Pre-pandemic)

Percentage of Respondents in Agreement

■ 2022 Agreement
■ Pre-pandemic Agreement

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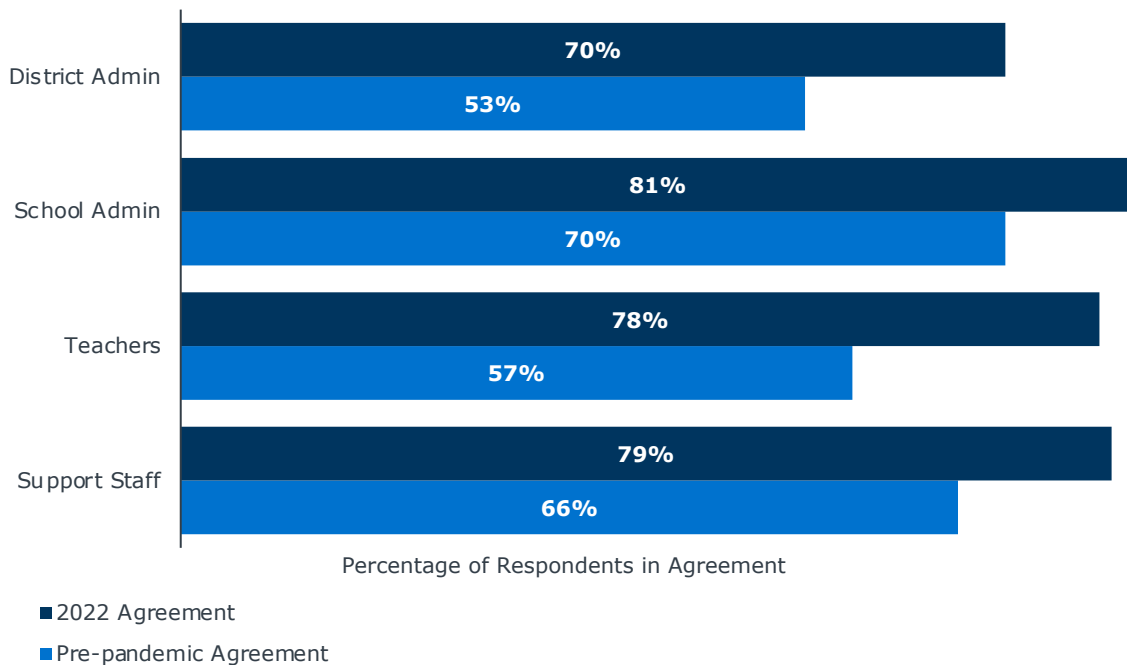
Concerns About Student Behavior Have Increased Since 2018

Most common behaviors consistent but occur with greater frequency

Opposition and emotional disconnect were the most common concerning behaviors in 2018 and 2022; however, educators are observing them more frequently now. It's important to note that the two most common behaviors include both an internalized and externalized behavior. While externalized behaviors are easier to identify, internalized behaviors can have just as much negative impact on students and their learning.

33% **69%**
Observed Frequent Opposition

20% **61%**
Observed Frequent Emotional Disconnect
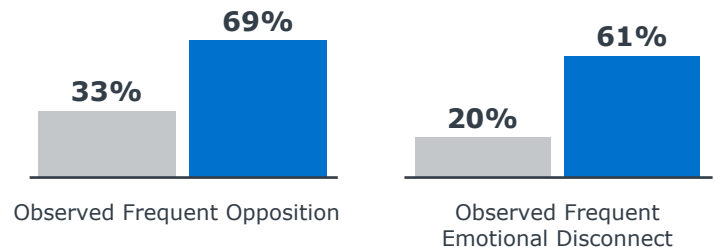
Students' relationships with peers have become more fraught

Learning disruptions and virtual instruction brought on by the pandemic have had a lasting impact on students' socialization. Students are lacking positive relationship-building skills compared to peers prior to the pandemic. Interpersonal behavioral concerns also growing beyond the classroom, with incidents between students on bus rides and in the cafeteria reported as occurring more frequently in 2022 than in 2018.
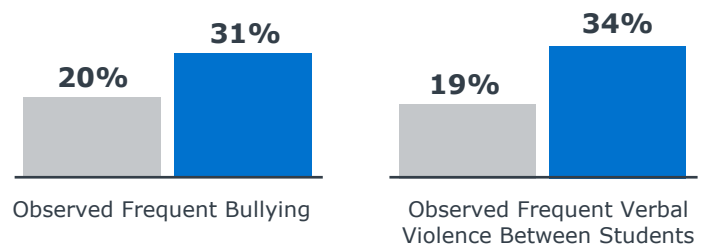
20% **31%**
Observed Frequent Bullying

19% **34%**
Observed Frequent Verbal Violence Between Students

Behaviors involving physical violence are on the rise

Physical violence negatively affects individual students and the overall school climate. It is important to consider how this disruption impacts perceptions around school safety, district disciplinary approaches, community trust, and connectedness.

15% **34%**
Observed Frequent Physical Violence Between Students

7% **13%**
Observed Frequent Physical Violence Against Teachers
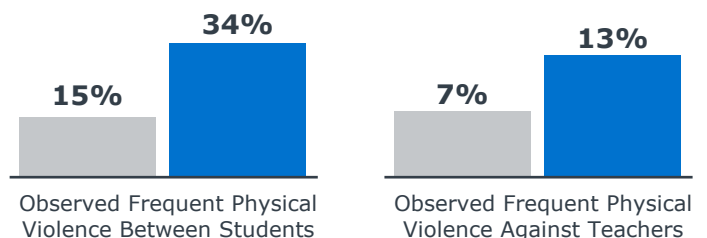
Teachers are increasingly the targets of students' disruptive behavior

Constant disrespect from students can take a toll on teachers' morale and make teachers feel undervalued in their role. This can negatively impact their ability to manage other school-related responsibilities, including managing student behavior successfully. Teachers best manage their classrooms when feeling safe and respected by their students.

11% **22%**
Observed Frequent Verbal Abuse Against Teachers

52% **68%**
Observed Frequent Opposition Toward Adults
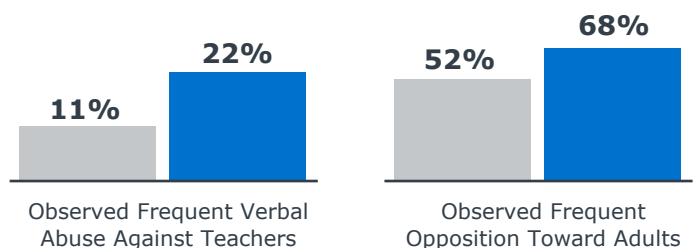
KEY: ■ 2018 ■ 2022

Source: EAB data, interviews and analysis.

Four Barriers Preventing Effective Behavior Management by Teachers

Barrier #1

Teachers indicated that there are not enough support staff to assist with behavior management (e.g., behavior specialists, school psychologists, instructional aides)

Barrier #2

Teachers note a disconnect between teachers and administration on how and when to follow the behavior management framework(s)

Barrier #3

Teachers perceive a lack of adequate training on how to implement behavior management techniques

Barrier #4

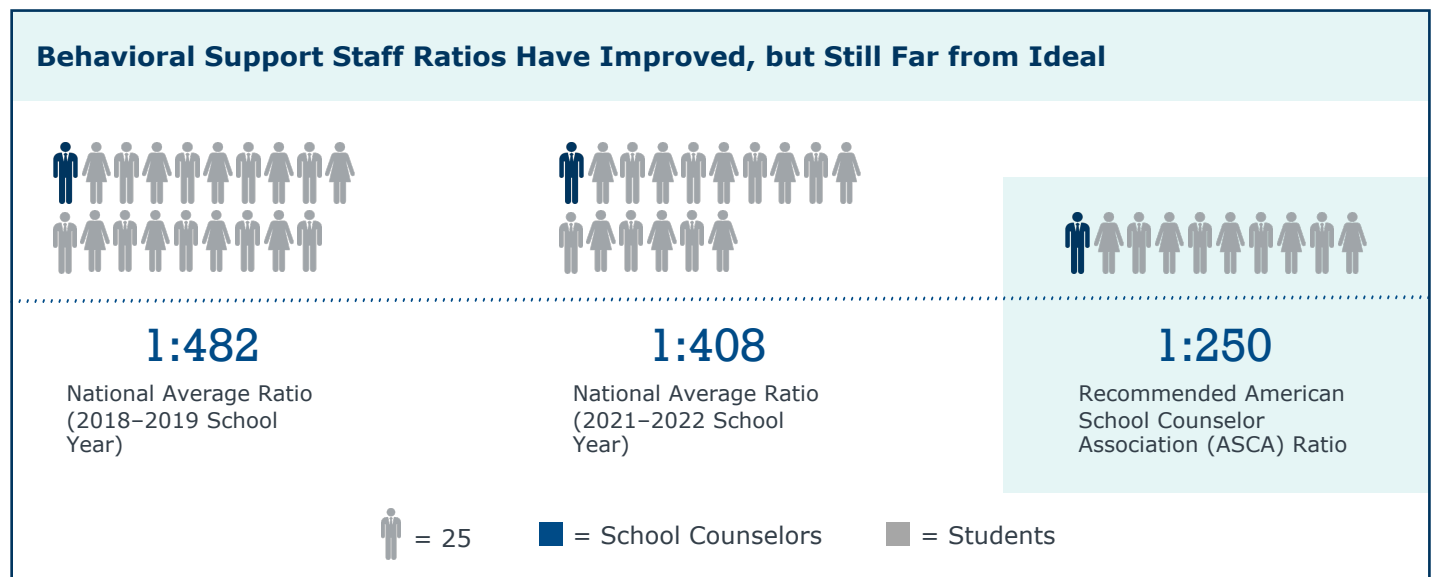Teachers feel pressure to prioritize academic curriculum over behavior management and feel there isn't enough time for both

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Despite Investment, Lack of Support Staff Is a Concern

And Contributes to Educators Feeling Under-Supported and Overwhelmed

School districts have hired more social workers, psychologists, school counselors, and other behavioral support specialists within the past several years to serve their students. For example, 74% of respondents from our 2018 survey reported there recently had been an increase in behavioral aides/specialists hired. However, 54% of teachers in our 2022 survey reported that a lack of support staff remains a major barrier to consistently following a district or school-wide behavior management framework.

Even though the national student-to-counselor ratio is at its lowest level in over 30 years, the ratios are still far from ideal. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) began tracking this metric in 1986 when the student-to-counselor ratio was 588:1. Although the ratio has narrowed significantly, school counselors continue to manage progressively higher caseloads, especially given the increasing student mental health needs due to the pandemic. While districts have improved their student-to-counselor ratio since our 2018 study, the national average ratio today is still nearly twice as high as the ASCA recommends.

Behavioral Support Staff Ratios Have Improved, but Still Far from Ideal

1:482	1:408	1:250
National Average Ratio (2018–2019 School Year)	National Average Ratio (2021–2022 School Year)	Recommended American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Ratio

👤 = 25   ⬛ = School Counselors   ⬜ = Students

Limited support staff leaves teachers feeling unequipped to effectively manage student behavior. Even with increased funding opportunities and district efforts to hire more support staff, our survey data shows that teachers are still concerned about being understaffed when it comes to student behavior. As the ratio data reveals, these concerns are grounded in reality. And unfortunately, even though districts are trying to hire more support staff, the positions are hard to fill. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) reported 60% of principals struggled to fill nonteaching positions ahead of the 2022–2023 school year. Ultimately, these shortages force teachers to take on the vacant roles themselves, contributing to them feeling under-supported and unable to successfully manage increasing student behavioral concerns.

Source: ASCA, "School Counselor Roles & Ratios," 2022; Education Dive, "School Counseling Resources Stretched Thin at Most Schools," 2018; IES, "School Pulse Panel," 2022; "NASP, "The Every Student Succeeds Act: Details of the New Law"; EAB interviews and analysis.

Administrators' Messaging on Behavior Is Inconsistent

Causing Confusion for Teachers on How to Effectively Manage Student Behavior

Nearly 40% of our 2022 survey respondents agreed that district and school administrators present inconsistent messaging on how and when to follow district behavior management strategies. This disconnect is not a new trend. In 2018, our research revealed that most districts had neither a clearly communicated nor consistently followed protocol for managing behavioral disruptions. Results of our 2022 survey show that district and school administrators believe they have an explicit district-wide behavior management framework at far higher rates than teachers do. This reinforces teachers' perspectives that administrators are not communicating behavior management expectations as clearly as they may think. Furthermore, this disconnect can cause confusion and uncertainty regarding how teachers should be managing student behavior.

More Administrators than Teachers Think Their District Has an Explicit Behavior Management Framework

Percentage of Respondents Who Indicated Their District Has an Explicit District-Wide Behavior Management Framework or Protocol for Managing Disruptive Behaviors
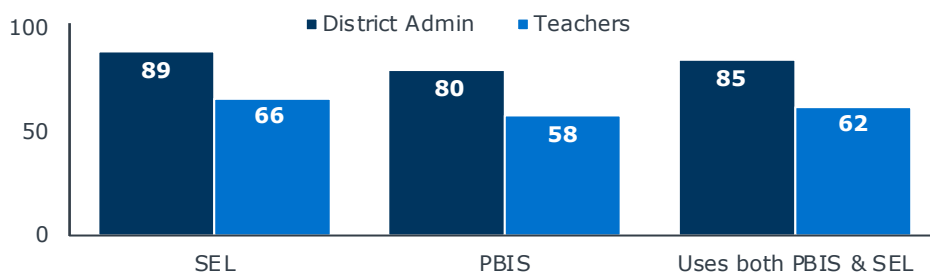
50%
District Administrators

55%
School Administrators

36%
Teachers
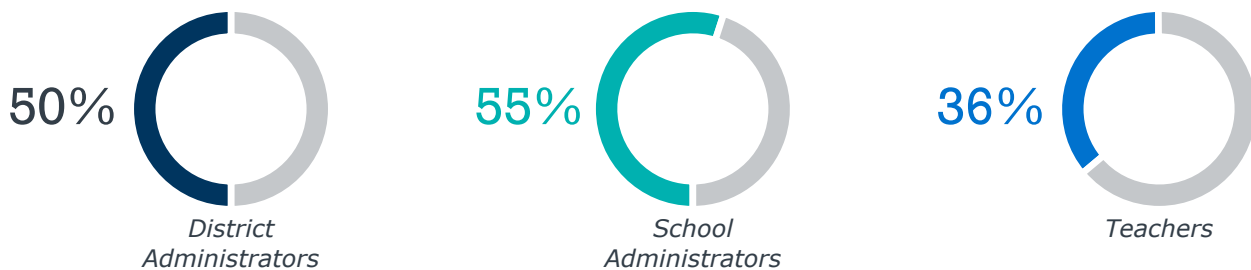
Our 2022 survey suggests that teachers are also unsure which behavior management strategies to use. One district surveyed had over 30 administrators claim the district uses PBIS and SEL, but zero teachers from that district indicated this to be true. This example suggests that teachers and administrators even within the same district may be completely unaligned on how they are managing behavior and teaching socio-emotional skills to their students.

Administrators Believe Their Staff Members Use Behavior Management Strategies at Higher Rates than Teachers Do

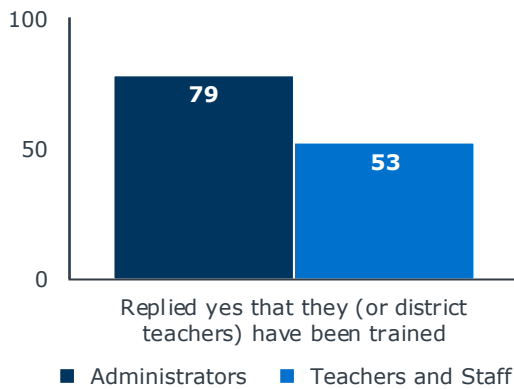*Percentage of Respondents Who Indicated Their District Uses SEL and/or PBIS*

■ District Admin   ■ Teachers

	SEL	PBIS	Uses both PBIS & SEL
District Admin	89	80	85
Teachers	66	58	62

Source: EAB data, interviews and analysis.

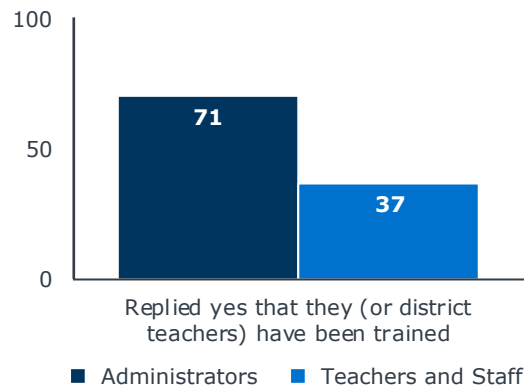# Teachers Think Behavior Management Is Not a Top District Priority

Our 2022 survey data shows district administrators believe teachers receive more behavior management support than teachers actually do. This includes overestimating the amount of training teachers and staff receive. It makes sense then that teachers cite a lack of training on behavior management techniques as a top barrier preventing effective behavior management.

Administrators Overestimate That Their Districts Provide Behavior Management Training

*For respondents whose district and/or school uses **PBIS:***

79	53

Replied yes that they (or district teachers) have been trained

■ Administrators   ■ Teachers and Staff

*For respondents whose district and/or school uses **SEL:***

71	37

Replied yes that they (or district teachers) have been trained

■ Administrators   ■ Teachers and Staff

In addition to feeling under-trained, teachers feel pressured to prioritize academic curriculum over behavior management. Districts' failure to dedicate adequate time to consistently provide training for teachers on behavior management and socio-emotional learning techniques likely contributes to this pressure. It signals that behavior management is not a priority. However, given the state of student behavior, it must become a priority. Without prioritizing time to ensure students have strong behavioral and socio-emotional skills, academics are unlikely to progress. And that starts with prioritizing time for teachers to hone their behavior management expertise and ensure teachers feel empowered to dedicate time in their classroom to support students behaviorally, emotionally, and socially.

Insufficient Time for Behavior Management Training Signals That It's a Low Priority

Percentage of Respondents Who Indicated PBIS and/or SEL Training Was Rarely or Never Revisited

For respondents whose district and/or school uses PBIS	50 / 67
For respondents whose district and/or school uses SEL	59 / 51

■ Administrators   ■ Teachers and Staff

ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.