



Tennessee Behavior Supports Project

at Vanderbilt University

Student Involvement Series: Meaningful Involvement

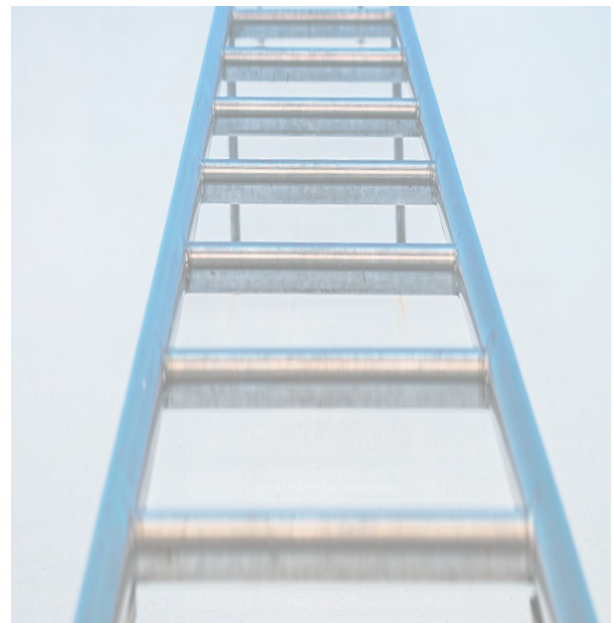
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This guide was produced by the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project at Vanderbilt University—one of three projects across the state funded by the Tennessee Department of Education to provide training and technical assistance to schools as they address social and behavioral needs of students. This brief was authored by Madelaine Ferrell, Melissa C. Hine, A. Dia Davis, Becky Haynes, Tara Axelroth, Brooke C. Shuster, Casey B. Chauvin, Blair P. Lloyd, and Erik W. Carter. 6/2020



Schools of all levels can reference the **Cycle of Meaningful Student Involvement** to promote meaningful student involvement in RTI²-B planning.¹ This cycle shows five steps to actively engage students in school improvement decisions. As opportunities for student involvement in RTI²-B are considered, schools can use Fletcher and Hart's **Ladder of Student Involvement** to examine the extent to which an opportunity is meaningful.¹ This ladder illustrates eight levels of student involvement. The lower rungs of the ladder represent non-participation, while the higher rungs represent high-quality, meaningful involvement. When using this tool, consider how your school could climb the ladder when involving students in decisions regarding the RTI²-B framework.





LISTEN:

Ideas, knowledge, experience, and opinions of students are shared with adults

REFLECT:

Adults and students examine what they have learned through creating, implementing, and supporting meaningful student involvement, including benefits and challenges

Validate:

Students are acknowledged as purposeful and significant partners who can and should hold themselves and their schools accountable

**Cycle of
Meaningful
Student
Involvement**

MOBILIZE:

Students and adults take action together as partners in school improvement through a variety of methods

AUTHORIZE:

Students develop their abilities to meaningfully contribute to school improvement through skill-sharing, action planning, and strategic participation

Fletcher, A. (2005). *Meaningful student involvement: Guide to students as partners in school change*. SoundOut.



Ladder of Student Involvement

Use this tool to assess your students' current opportunities to participate in RTI²-B planning. The highest level of participation – Level 8 – is the most meaningful. As you refine your RTI²-B plan, aim for higher rungs and more meaningful student involvement.

Ladder Level		Definition
Degrees of Participation	8. Student-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Students initiate action and share decision-making with adults.
	7. Student-initiated, student-led decisions	Meaningful student involvement is propelled by students and creates opportunities for students to initiate and direct projects, classes, or activities. Adults are involved only in supportive roles.
	6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with students	Students are involved in designing projects, classes, or activities that are initiated by adults. Many activities, including decision-making, teaching, and evaluation, are shared with students.
	5. Students informed and consulted	Students give advice on projects, classes, or activities designed and run by adults. The students are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.
	4. Students informed and assigned	Student involvement is assigned by teachers who assign specific roles and teach students why they are being involved.
Degrees of Non-Participation	3. Students tokenized	Students appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.
	2. Students are decoration	Students are used to help or bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way; adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by students. Causes are determined by adults, and adults make all decisions.
	1. Students manipulated	Adults use students to support causes by pretending that those causes are inspired by students.

Fletcher, A. (2005). *Meaningful student involvement: Guide to students as partners in school change*. SoundOut.

Hart, R. (1994). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. London: Earthscan



Summary

Involving students in the planning process of the RTI²-B framework is important, but schools need to make sure students have a meaningful level of involvement. Students should feel their ideas are valued when asked for input, and adults should be ready to fully collaborate with students and share in the decision-making process.

For Further Reading

Feuerborn, L., Wallace, C., & Tyre, A. (2016). A qualitative analysis of middle and high school teacher perceptions of school wide positive behavior supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 18(4), 219-229.

Mitra, D. (2006). Increasing student voice. *The Prevention Researcher*, 13(1), 7-10.

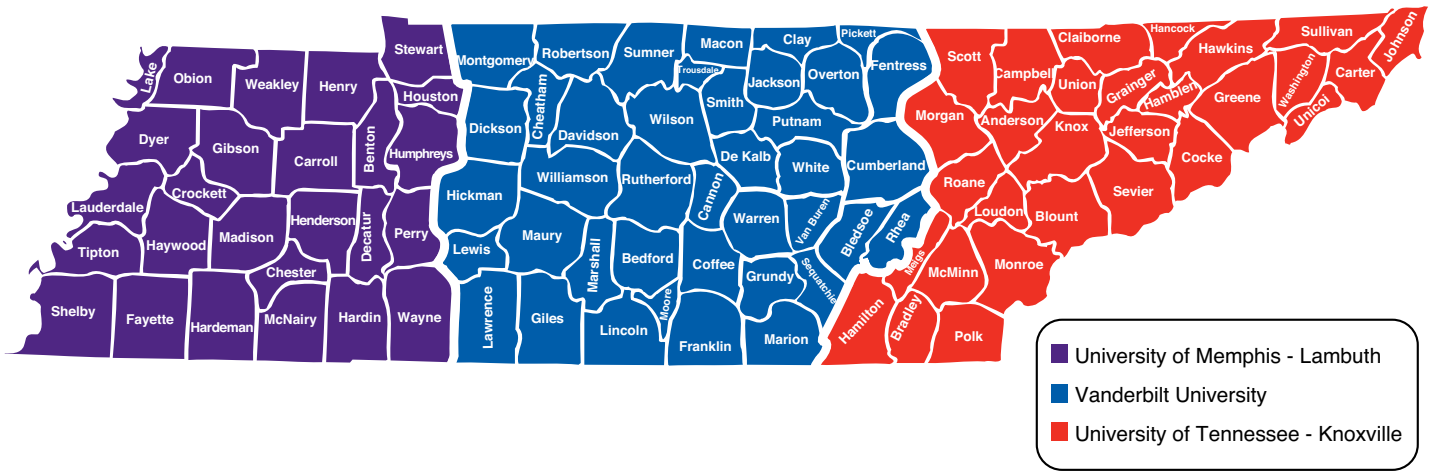
Smyth, J. (2006). When students have power. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 285-298.

Endnotes

¹Mitra, D. L. (2009). Strengthening student voice initiatives in high school: An examination of the supports needed for school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Youth & Society*, 40(3), 311-335.



Tennessee Behavior Supports Project by Region: 2016-2020



The Tennessee Behavior Supports Project (TBSP) is funded by the Tennessee Department of Education and consists of three regional support contracts: University of Memphis – Lambuth Campus, Vanderbilt University, and University of Tennessee – Knoxville. TBSP is responsible for providing training and technical assistance to schools as they address the behavioral needs of students through Response to Instruction and Intervention for Behavior (RTI²-B). To locate the project assigned to your region, see below.



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