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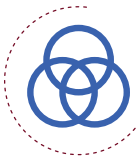
PBIS

Positive Behavioral
Interventions & Supports

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING EXTERNAL OFFERS OF SUPPORT IN CRISIS RECOVERY

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Considerations for Evaluating External Offers of Support in Crisis Recovery

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Purpose

Following a crisis event, districts often receive an outpouring of support, offers of help, and donations. The purpose of this brief is to provide district leadership teams with considerations for navigating the process of selecting supports from external entities during crisis response and recovery. It can be used for planning and preparation for crisis and emergencies as well as just-in-time during a crisis but is not meant to be a comprehensive implementation plan. For further information on crisis recovery actions, [visit the Crisis Recovery Topic¹](#) on the Center for PBIS website.



Introduction

District leadership teams can feel pressure to accept offers of support or to partner with vendors or community partners offering safety or recovery support. Careful consideration of new partnerships and matching this support to the needs specific to the event is an often-overlooked part of the recovery process (e.g., Reuters, 2018; Rooker, 2024).

Leveraging local resources and support is often a key feature of recovery from crisis for school districts. People and businesses from the local community can often provide perspective, awareness of specific needs, and tangible assistance and resources throughout the response and recovery periods. However, when local resources are not enough to sustain long-term or large-scale recovery, it is often necessary to engage external partners, subject matter experts, and event-related resources from outside the affected area. It is important that all external offers of support consider adaptations to content or delivery as needed to fit the specific situation, rather than asking the school district to make accommodations or changes during a time in which the focus needs to be on re-establishing routines and facilitating recovery.

General Considerations for External Offers of Support

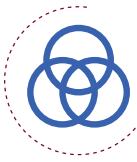
- Decision making on all external offers of support should be made by a district leadership team, guided by data and the [district recovery plan](#).²
- A public recovery plan and ongoing sharing of data can support the communities understanding of district decisions about external offers of support.

Key Takeaways

- Crisis recovery is difficult and navigating offers of external support can add stress to the recovery process.
 - Selecting external entities to provide support can be made easier when using a thoughtful approach.
 - Not every offer of external support will be a good fit and districts need to be strategic in evaluating the needs of the district and connection to supports being offered.
- Generally fewer well aligned external supports are better and more effective in a crisis recovery context (Fessler, 2013). More support that is not aligned or focused on need is not necessarily better (Alfonseca, 2022; Eaton-Robb, 2013; [Kix, 2017](#)).³
 - New initiatives, even if aligned with district need or planned prior to the crisis incident, should be re-evaluated in the context of recovery. It can be useful to postpone significant changes in curriculum or initiatives until the learning environment is re-stabilized and district capacity to support the new initiative is restored.

Selecting External Supports

Each district and each crisis event is unique and need for external support will vary. The following questions are meant to prompt considerations for district leadership teams and are not intended as definitive guidance. In the initial response phase and prior to the development of a recovery plan, district teams should rely on pre-vetted or established regional or state supports and delay decision making about



other external partnerships or vendors until a deeper assessment of need is conducted and a clearer vision for recovery is established.

Step 1: Define District Need and the Plan for Recovery

Even well intended offers of support, if not aligned with district need or the vision for recovery, can take valuable resources away from recovery efforts or compromise the district's ability to re-establish routines, avoid disruptions in schedules, or overwhelming staff with new procedures or trainings. Leadership teams can make more informed decisions by considering multiple sources and types of data when developing an understanding of district needs and the impact of the crisis incident. Leadership teams can begin by establishing an understanding of baseline strengths and needs prior to the incident (e.g., baseline attendance rates, academic performance, school climate, behavior referrals) This baseline can be used to contextualize data during the recovery process by considering if new data points are above or below baseline levels. This [district recovery plan template](#)⁴ provides additional guidance and considerations for developing this plan.

Step 2: Assess Specific Offers of Support

Following the development of a clear understanding of district need and a vision for recovery, district teams are well positioned to assess offers of external support. The flow chart in Figure 1 and the following guiding questions and examples can help prompt discussion and guide decision making.

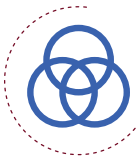


GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Is the offer of support aligned with a clear district need or recovery priority?

If the answer is clearly yes, the leadership team should move on to considering other guiding questions. If the answer is no, the leadership team may consider declining the offer and looking for a support that is better aligned. If the answer is partially the team may consider either declining the offer and looking for a support that is better aligned or asking for adaptations that more directly meet district needs.

Example. In one district, an external entity offered to provide free massages to all school staff during the school day. While this support was generous and well-intended, it was not well aligned with identified district needs, and the team determined that the disruptions it would cause to the school schedule would be



counter to the district's efforts to re-establish routines. Therefore, the team asked the provider to consider offering vouchers to staff to access their free massage outside of school hours.

2. Is the offer of support supported by research?

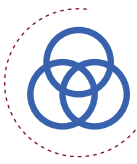
Next, the team should consider the research support for the offered service or product. If the offer of support is clearly evidence-based or closely aligned with established research supported practices the team can move forward to consider other guiding questions. If the practice is not clearly aligned with research but is closely aligned with district needs or priorities, the team will need to consider first if there are research-based supports that would fit the need and if so, should prioritize those supports. If other options are not available, the team should compare the potential harms (e.g., cost, time required of staff or students) of selecting the practice to the potential benefits of selecting the offer.

Example. In one district, an external entity offered to provide clear backpacks for all students. Students and families had expressed a clear and strong preference for requiring clear backpacks in schools following an incident. While there is not clear evidence that clear backpacks improve safety, the team determined that there were minimal potential harms and there were benefits to acknowledging and meeting the preferences of students and families.

3. Is the offer of support aligned with current district practices?

During recovery, staff and students are focused on re-establishing routines and stabilizing the learning environment. Maintaining predictable and familiar practices and routines supports student and staff wellbeing by decreasing the need to learn and implement new or different practices. To the greatest extent possible, districts should emphasize enhancing or adjusting current practices over adopting new ones. If the offer of support is closely aligned with existing practices, then the team can move forward to consider additional guiding questions. If it is not aligned with current practices but is aligned with documented need or priority and is evidence-based, the team may consider delaying the offer of support until after the learning environment is restabilized and district capacity to support implementation is restored.

Example. In one district, baseline math scores were low and the district had been considering adopting a new math curriculum. An external entity offered to provide the curriculum and training. The team determined that staff needed time to re-stabilize the learning environment before they would be ready to take on a new math curriculum. In addition, district instructional coaches had been re-deployed to support recovery, and the district did not have the capacity to support high quality training and coaching. Therefore they decided to delay the adoption of the new math curriculum.



4. Is the offer of support flexible enough to fit within district timelines and budget?

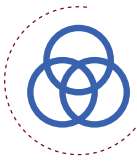
Following a crisis event, there are often external grants or donations that can support short-term initiatives. Leadership teams should carefully consider the long-term fiscal implications of external offers of supports because external grants and donations often fade and the districts operating budget will need to be able to sustain any ongoing initiatives. Similarly, some external offers of support may come “pre-packaged” as a 2- or 3-year initiative, but recovery-specific resources may come on shorter timelines. If the offer of support is feasible and fits within district short- and long-term budget constraints and meets district timelines, that team can move forward to consider the final guiding question. If the offer of support is not feasible or flexible enough to fit budget or timelines, the team may look for a more feasible or flexible option or request adaptations that are better aligned with district budget and timeline needs.

***Example.** In one district, a local provider offered to provide STEM education after-school clubs for students funded for 2 years. The district felt the offer was well aligned with their vision for recovery and was evidence-based and aligned with their current practices. However, they did not have the long-term capacity to sustain implementation after the initial funding was gone. After discussion, they decided to accept the offer of support but began the process of looking for additional funds to support long-term implementation.*

5. Is a clear evaluation process identified for assessing the implementation and outcomes associated with this offer of support?

The final consideration for leadership teams is the plan for evaluating the implementation of the offered service or support. A clear plan for evaluating both implementation fidelity and student outcomes will help leadership teams adjust implementation supports or modify the intervention to ensure student benefit. External support offers that include a clear and strong evaluation plan may be considered a good fit for the district and the leadership team may consider accepting the offer and allocating adequate resources (e.g., staff training and coaching) to support effective implementation. If the offer does not include a strong evaluation plan the district should ensure any new initiative or service is adequately evaluated by either requesting the external entity build an evaluation plan or incorporating the new service or support into the existing district evaluation structures.

***Example.** In one district, local providers offered to provide supplemental mental health support during the school day for students and staff needing it. This proposal did not include plans for evaluating the effectiveness of this support. In this case, the district team decided to extend their existing evaluation structure for evaluating the fidelity of implementation for supplemental supports and student and staff outcomes. This allowed the district to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of the supplemental support in the context of all their mental*



health offerings and supported decision making related to fading supplemental support when school district capacity was sufficient for meeting the need.

Additional Considerations for Selection and Vetting of External Entities

The external support personnel should be experienced in the delivery of support under rapidly changing conditions associated with a crisis or disaster response and recovery. Adaptability and flexibility along with consistent and effective communication with a consistent point of contact is important.

Consider asking the following questions:

- Does the vendor or community partner have a “track record” with crisis implementation?
- Are they adaptable and responsive?
- Is there a clearly identified point of contact for any issues that arise?

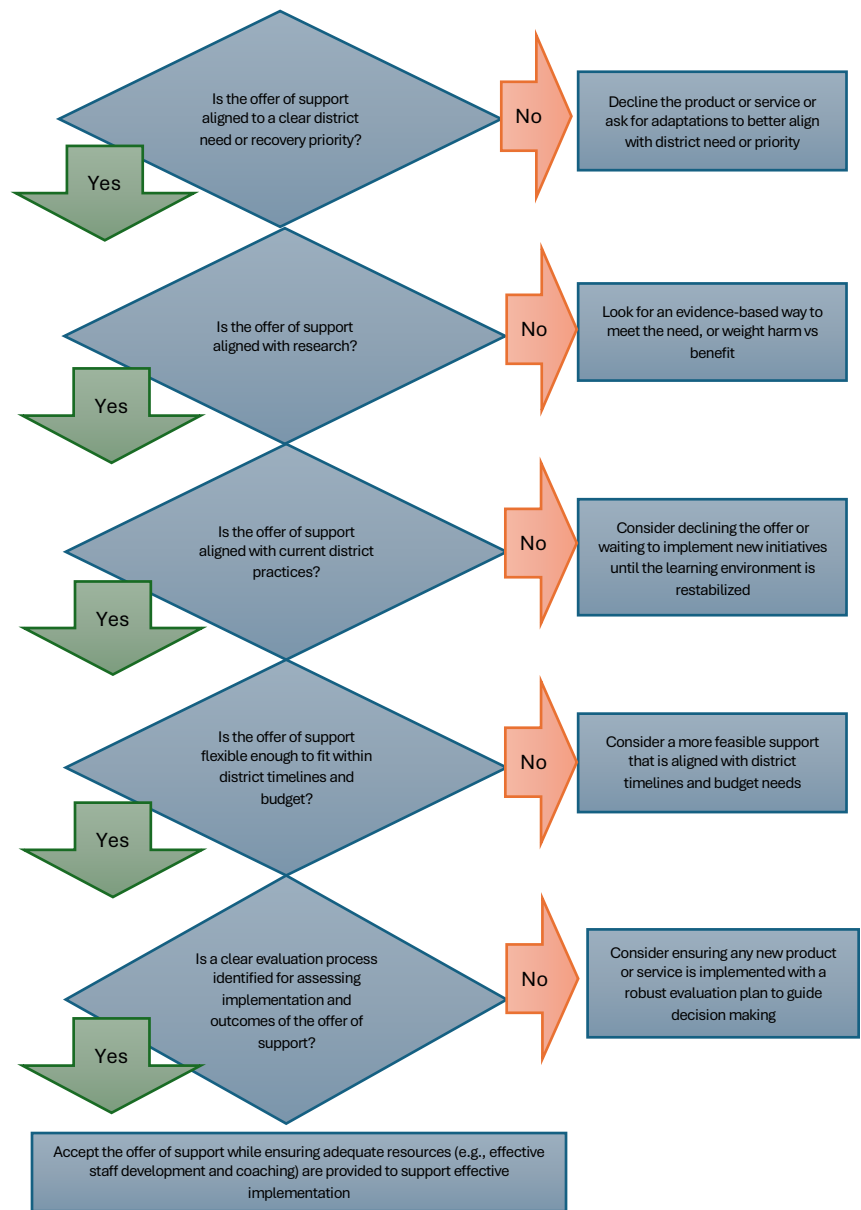
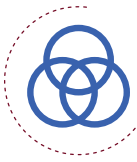
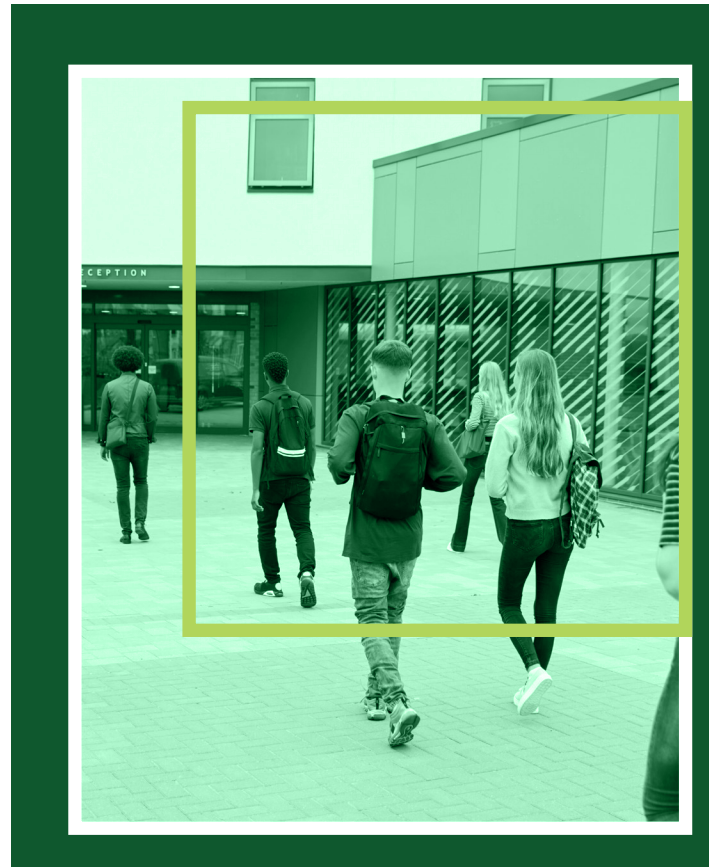


Figure 1. Decision Making Flow Chart



Additional Considerations for Implementation Supports

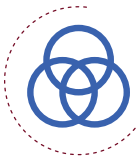
One of the biggest challenges in implementation or adoption of new or additional supports during crisis recovery is doing so in a way that doesn't put additional or undue strain on district personnel. There is a need for any external support, in this case, to be highly responsive, capable, and somewhat independent; it is important that the process of 'offering support' doesn't further deplete already taxed resources in term of time, money and energy on the part of the district. Often a concern is how much autonomy may be appropriate, which is why there should be an agreement in place prior to any work being started that defines clear responsibilities for the external entity and details reporting requirements and timelines. Progress reports should include progress, challenges, the steps they have taken and any ongoing identified additional needs. Districts should also consider the long-term plan for providing this support. In some cases, the external entity may address a short-term need and as the need fades the support can also fade, but in other cases, there may be ongoing need for support that cannot be addressed by the external entity due to funding constraints or needs that persist beyond the contract with the external entity. In this case districts should consider a plan to begin developing internal implementation capacity and a plan to transfer implementation responsibilities from the external entity to district personnel. Building district capacity may involve the external entity allowing district personnel to shadow external personnel, sharing protocols and data, plans to ensure adequate



FTE is allocated, and providing relevant training and coaching to district personnel.

Consider asking the following questions:

- What district resources will be needed for initial implementation?
- What district resources will be needed for ongoing implementation or follow up?
- What reports are provided to the district by the external entity to summarize the work being done and the progress that has been made?
- Is there a need to build district capacity for long term implementation? If so, how will the external entity partner with district personnel to develop capacity?



Additional Considerations for Ongoing Evaluation

As the time from the incident increases, needs change. It is important that there is clarity in understanding how and when any additional supports that were brought in or added as function of the crisis will be evaluated for ongoing utility or helpfulness. Clear communication with the external entity around outcome measures, end results, or termination of subcontracting is ideally established with the onset of the contract. If that hasn't been done, then an evaluation process will need to be undertaken to determine when the supports will need to be discontinued or adapted into the "new normal" and out of the response work. Sometimes the delineation of this shift is important when it comes to emergency funding or recovery grants. The point when support is removed can be a vulnerable time for staff who have come to rely on this resource. Planning for the "after" in terms of monitoring impact on staff and students, and a phased approach may need to be considered. It can be helpful to have an already established set of expectations or benchmarks that can be measured and compared using accessible data sources.

Consider asking the following questions:

- What data sources are already available to determine how this support can address any ongoing need?
- How will we know when the support is no longer needed?
- Should the district consider adapting the support into their ongoing post-crisis operations? If so, how is that measured?
- Will the external entity disseminate findings from this work? If so, clarify what permissions would be required from the district.

Conclusion

It is difficult to navigate a response and recovery process following a crisis. Often there are many external entities that offer support. This document provides considerations for selecting external response and recovery supports.



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Embedded Hyperlinks

1. <https://www.pbis.org/crisis-recovery>
2. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IEp5yqIKf3UCWwehQPn-Y2ReDNXXOYVy/edit>
3. <https://www.thetrace.org/2017/12/sandy-hook-mass-shooting-teddy-bears/>
4. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IEp5yqIKf3UCWwehQPn-Y2ReDNXXOYVy/edit>

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