



Factors that Affect Sustainability of Evidence-Based Curricula in Schools

Prevention science has identified numerous interventions that reduce risky behaviors (like substance use) in youth. With this success, governmental and philanthropic funds have been widely used to support schools in implementing such evidence-based interventions (EBIs). However, information about whether these programs continue to be implemented after start-up funding is often unknown.

The Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST) Middle School curriculum is an example of an intervention that has been disseminated on a large scale, including by the team at the University of Colorado Boulder. This project examined the following research questions, at two years post start-up support:



1. What percent of schools sustained EBI implementation?
2. How well did sustaining schools implement LST?
3. What factors are associated with sustaining LST?

Study Setting

- 158 school districts (including 419 schools)
- Between 2010 and 2019, schools received at least three years of grant support, funding LST curriculum materials, teacher training, and technical assistance.
- Two years post-grant support, districts were interviewed about LST status.



Results

- 51% of districts sustained LST.
- Most sustaining districts reported following key guidelines for LST.

51%
of districts sustained

Factors Associated with Sustainment

- Teachers' positive perceptions of LST (easy to implement, beneficial to students, fits with school goals).
- Administrators' positive perceptions of organizational support for LST.
- School racial and ethnic composition (only categories that had a strong correlation with socioeconomic status).

Takeaways

- Teachers' and administrators' favorable perceptions are critical for sustainment, and cultivating their support during grant years may increase their likelihood to sustain post-funding.
- Schools and communities navigate many competing demands and may discontinue programming in light of their specific circumstances. While supports may make the program feasible to maintain, sustaining any specific EBI is not always the "right" choice for every school.



Needs More Research

- Post-grant years affected by COVID-19 had a negative relationship with sustaining, though not quite statistically significant ($p=.06$). Programming that supports students' mental health and social and emotional well-being is especially important due to the pandemic's impact on youth.
- The complex relationship between district race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sustainment need further investigation to explain the true causes of differences noted due to race and ethnicity.

