

UNICEF EDUCATION

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Case Study

JAMAICA

A whole-school approach to improve learning, safety and wellbeing

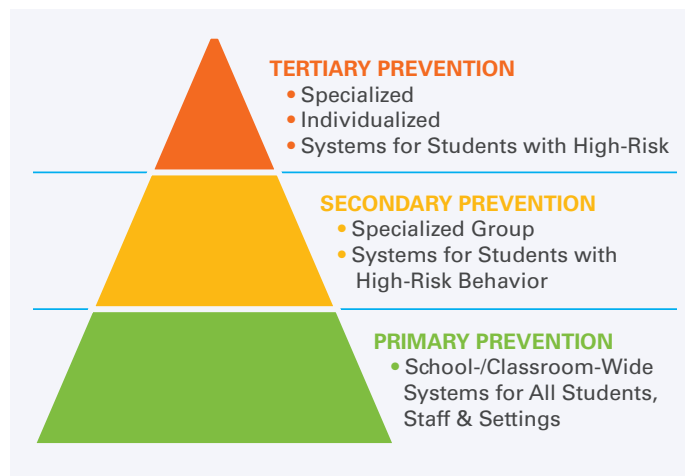
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Most Jamaican children have access to publicly funded education; however, poor student participation, attendance, progress, completion and transition to secondary level education, especially among boys from economically disadvantaged communities, remain alarming. Approximately 50,000 secondary school-age adolescents, of whom [60 per cent are boys](#), are out of school. Violence is a major contributor and can deleteriously impact children's wellbeing and mental health, and ultimately lead to lower academic achievement. In Jamaica, [85 per cent of children](#) under the age of 15 experience different forms of violence in their homes, schools and communities. At schools, children could be exposed to peer-to-peer violence (such as physical fights and bullying), corporal punishment by teachers, sexual harassment, assault and witnessing violence. Likewise, teachers and administrators also experience violence in the school setting.

In response, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MEYI) began implementing the [School-Wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support \(SWPBIS\) Framework](#). Since 2014, UNICEF has been supporting the MEYI to contextualise, pilot and scale up SWPBIS in all primary and secondary schools. School staff are rigorously trained in violence prevention, building safe environments, leading response and support services for affected students and promoting positive social and emotional skills.

SWPBIS is a student-centred, psychosocial support intervention that aims to bring together school communities to improve social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children and adolescents. It is a collection of practices, interventions and systems that enhance learning outcomes and promote positive and respectful relationships among peers and teachers. SWPBIS functions at three levels:

- Tier 1 School-wide (Mild) – disseminating information and lessons on positive behavior to all students.
- Tier 2 Targeted (Moderate) – providing specific support to at-risk children to better understand the challenges they face and provide preliminary support.
- Tier 3 Intensive (Severe) – deals with children whose behaviour repeatedly falls short of school standards and can involve referrals to child counsellors or social services where appropriate and when available.



RESULTS ACHIEVED

Initially, SWPBIS was a three-year pilot project in 56 primary and secondary level schools across the country. By 2018, 30,000 children and 6,000 teachers in 56 schools were reached. Additionally, 100 national health and family life education officers were trained in the methodology. In 2019, the U.S. Agency for International Development supported another 217 schools to reach close to 30 per cent of schools in Jamaica. Schools successfully implementing SWPBIS reported improvements in attendance, behaviour and academic achievement. For example, simple initiatives such as introducing attendance cards helped Chester Castle All-Age School in Hanover raise attendance by 20 per cent. Between 2019 and 2020, a UNICEF-funded evaluation of the pilot phase was completed and is being used to guide the national scale-up of the SWPBIS framework.

LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluation findings indicated that to ensure sustainability, a representative from the SWPBIS team should be embedded in every school, maintaining a strong administrative presence and ongoing support. Each SWPBIS team uses the SWPBIS framework and examples of best practices to design that school's unique set of practices and tailor appropriate procedures to benefit the most boys and girls.

NEXT STEPS

In 2021, UNICEF, in collaboration with the National College on Educational, is developing a free online professional development course for school leaders that includes SWPBIS modules. UNICEF is also supporting the MEYI to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework, to finalize the national Safe Schools Policy and to establish a Safer Schools website that will be used both as an informational hub and to generate buy-in around the SWPBIS approach.

Cost effectiveness: From 2014 to 2020, UNICEF provided technical support and invested US \$50,000 to US \$100,000 *per year* to support the implementation of SWPBIS in 56 pilot schools. This included the pilot evaluation and the development of a strategic scale-up plan, which contains a monitoring and evaluation framework. From 2021, by introducing new free-to-access online training and resources, the implementation cost is expected to reduce substantially.

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