

School-based prevention

School-based prevention involves **coordinated, evidence-based strategies delivered at schools** to prevent or reduce the risk of developing problem behaviors — such as substance use, risky sexual behavior, or aggressive and disruptive behaviors — while promoting protective factors that promote student well-being, health and academic success. Successful school-based prevention requires commitment from school leaders, dedicated curriculum time, and proper training for the staff or partners delivering the program.

Overview of the models

PAX Good Behavior Game, Botvin LifeSkills Training, and Project Towards No Drug Abuse are examples of school-based prevention strategies that take an upstream approach to preventing or reducing the risk of youth substance use, including opioid use. These programs can be used independently or in combination with each other.

PAX Good Behavior Game (GBG) is a classroom-based approach designed for elementary teachers in kindergarten through 5th grade to implement a set of research-based strategies, called “kernels,” to improve children’s self-regulation, behavior, and academic success.

In this approach:

- Trained teachers use brief games and non-verbal techniques like integrating moments of mindfulness or self-regulation strategies throughout the day to help students manage emotions and transitions between activities
- Teachers deliver this strategy for their entire classroom alongside normal daily instructional activities
- Research has indicated students who participate in the PAX GBG in early elementary are less likely to use drugs or develop a substance use disorder, including opioid use disorder, in young adulthood¹
- Parents can learn and implement the same strategies at home with an optional parent component called PAX Tools

Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST) is a lesson-based substance use and violence prevention classroom curriculum for 3rd through 12th graders, designed to help students gain skills in self-management, general social interaction and drug resistance.

In this approach:

- The curriculum can be implemented across entire schools, specific grade levels, or in selected, smaller groups of students at elevated risk for substance use
- Research has shown that students who received Botvin LST lessons in 7th grade were less likely to misuse opioids throughout middle and high school, and by 12th grade, the likelihood of beginning to misuse opioids was reduced by 4.4%²

About us

Healthy Minds Policy Initiative is a nonprofit LLC contracted by the Oklahoma Office of the Attorney General to support the Oklahoma opioid abatement grant program.

EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR OPIOID ABATEMENT

- Districts can consider working with community partners to also provide the Strengthening Families Program 10-14 in coordination with Botvin LST — one research study showed combining both programs significantly reduces the risk of opioid misuse the most among adolescents and young adults³

Project Towards No Drug Abuse (TND) is a classroom, lesson-based substance use prevention program for high school students that focuses on motivation and teaches students decision-making and coping skills.

In this approach:

- The program can be delivered across the entire school, for specific grade levels, or in selected, smaller groups of students at elevated risk for substance use
- Lessons help reduce drug use, including opioids, by addressing peer influences and promoting healthy behaviors
- Research shows that the curriculum is effective for older teens and reduces the use of substance use, including opioids⁴

Implementation considerations

School-based prevention requires a collective effort and commitment from school leaders, dedicated time to deliver lessons for students to learn knowledge and skills, and proper training for staff and educators to deliver the strategies with fidelity. Schools must also follow district policies and procedures for parent or guardian consent and communication.

Healthy Minds recommends districts consult with program developers before adapting or modifying any program curriculum, as even well-intended changes could be counterproductive and reduce effectiveness. Each strategy has its own set of implementation considerations:

	PAX Good Behavior Game	Botvin LifeSkills Training	Project Toward No Drug Abuse
Program type	Classroom approach, not lesson-based	Lesson-based curriculum	Lesson-based curriculum
Program provider	Oklahoma State University – Center for Family Resilience	Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services	University of Southern California – Institute for Prevention Research
Training	One 8-hour training day. (Multiple dates may be needed to allow flexibility and substitute coverage.)	Complete a 6-hour online training workshop within a 7-day period. A training schedule is available online with more details.	Complete either a 1- or 2-day in-person or online training workshop. Additional training details are available online.
Implementation	Teachers can immediately implement after completing training.	Lessons must be taught in order on an intensive schedule (2-3 lessons per week) or an extended schedule (1 lesson per week) until program is completed.	Lessons must be taught in order on an intensive schedule (3 lessons per week) or an extended schedule (2 lessons per week) until program is completed.

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	PAX Good Behavior Game	Botvin LifeSkills Training	Project Toward No Drug Abuse
Evaluation	Participate in all required questionnaires and surveys to measure effectiveness.	Students complete a pre- and post-program survey to measure outcomes.	Students complete a pre- and post-program survey to measure outcomes.
Steps to get started	Contact the Oklahoma PAX Team to schedule a planning meeting and schedule training.	Contact ODMHSAS for additional planning resources, begin ordering curriculum, and schedule training for staff.	Contact program developer for additional planning resources, begin ordering curriculum, and schedule training for staff.

Additional reading and resources

[PAXIS Institute: School-based programming](#) website

The Oklahoma PAX Support Team at Oklahoma State University can also provide training and support to schools and communities statewide.
Contact: paxcfr@okstate.edu

[Botvin LifeSkills Training](#) program website

[Project Towards No Drug Abuse](#) program website

[Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services: School-based prevention & intervention services](#)

[Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs: Youth services agency information](#)

References

- 1 Kellam, S. G., Wang, W., Mackenzie, A. C., Brown, C. H., Ompad, D. C., Or, F., Ialongo, N. S., Poduska, J. M., & Windham, A. (2014). The impact of the Good Behavior Game, a universal classroom-based preventive intervention in first and second grades, on high-risk sexual behaviors and drug abuse and dependence disorders into young adulthood. *Preventive Science, 15*(1).
- 2 Crowley, D. M, Jones, D. E., Coffman, D. L., & Greenberg, M. T (2014). Can we build an efficient response to the prescription drug abuse epidemic? Assessing the cost effectiveness of universal prevention in the PROSPER trial. *Prevention Medicine, 62*, 71-77.
- 3 Spoth, R., Trudeau, L., Redmond, C., Shin, C., Ralston, E., Redmond, C., Greenberg, M., Feinberg, M. (2013). Longitudinal effects of universal preventative intervention on prescription drug misuse: Three randomized controlled trials with late adolescents and young adults. *American Journal of Public Health, 103*(4), 665-672.
- 4 Sussman, Steve & Stacy, Alan. (2002). Project Towards No Drug Abuse: A Review of the Findings and Future Directions. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 26*, 354-65.