

BIG Act FAQ

1. What does the BIG Act do?

The BIG Act requires the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop best practices for schools to establish Behavioral Intervention Teams (BITs) (i.e., experts who are responsible for identifying individuals of concern and addressing associated behavioral and emotional health issues to reduce distress, provide support, and prevent harm to the individual or others).

2. What is a Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT)?

A Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) is a small group of appointed school officials who regularly collect and review information about at-risk community members and develop intervention plans to assist them. The BIT is tasked with taking in referrals from the community, reviewing them to determine the level of risk or concern, and then developing action plans to address this risk before any threat or crisis occurs.

3. Who Serves on a BIT?

BITs are comprised of school staff and generally include:

- Dean of Students/Principal
- Director of Student Conduct/Assistant Principal
- Mental Health Representative
- Law Enforcement or Safety Representative
- Residential Life Representative
- Faculty/Teacher Representative
- Case Manager
- Disability Support Services Representative

4. How much does the legislation cost?

The bill has no funding element. It simply provides guidance and best practices for schools to use. Schools do not need to hire additional staff to operate a BIT.

5. Is the BIG Act a new mandate for schools?

The BIG Act will produce guidelines and best practices, and it is not meant to be prescriptive or mandatory to schools, especially those with well-established and functional teams in place.

However, most school districts do not have proper BITs in place. According to the NABITA's research, there are less than 2,000 BITs currently operating in schools on the primary and higher education levels. While many schools have the people and personnel in place, they do not have a formalized BIT structure, which is what helps the school and students thrive. If a team is in place at the K-12 level, it is often a threat assessment team, not a BIT.

6. What is the difference between a Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) and Threat Assessment Team?

A threat assessment team's primary purpose is far more limited than a BIT in scope. Their objective is to identify, evaluate, and address threats or potential threats to school security. Threat assessment teams only get involved when the behavior has escalated to the point of posing a potential threat. Such a limited approach limits the team's ability to provide support to students and intervene before there is a crisis.

A BIT is an integrated team equipped to address early intervention cases as well as threat assessment cases. An integrated team strengthens the overall approach of the team as it allows campuses to engage with students and provide them support before the behavior escalates to a threat. A BIT engages in proactive, preventive, and early intervention with students exhibiting academic issues, mental health, or behavioral issues before serious consequences occur. The primary goal of a BIT is the mental wellbeing of the student body and is there to support students going through a difficult time.

When behavioral intervention is approached in this way, not only do teams provide support to any student who needs it, they may also head off threats or violence before they occur. The history of campus violence demonstrates that individuals who engage in targeted attacks demonstrated concerning behavior towards others well in advance of the attack. Integrating threat assessment into the BIT's overall preventative approach helps schools address problems before they worsen and aims to balance providing support to individual students with maintaining the safety of the entire community.

7. How do BITs improve school climate issues at schools?

The goal of a BIT is to intervene to support academic success, mental health needs, and behavioral needs before any serious consequences occur to the student. The NABITA survey data supports that BITs function in this preventative, supportive way as 86% of teams report that their most common risk rating for cases is mild or moderate – indicating general wellbeing concerns, academic difficulties, low level emotional or mental health concerns.

Most of the BIT's work is predominately focused on mental health and general wellbeing:

- 26% of individuals are referred to BITs because of General Wellbeing:
 - Academics
 - Financial concerns
 - Relationship difficulties
 - Social Service needs

- 61% of individuals are referred to BITs because of Psychological reasons:
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Suicide
 - Asperger's
 - Psychosis

8. Are BITs tied to the Response to Intervention (RTI) tier system?

No. An RTI team is a multi-tier approach for early identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs, and the fact the students have to qualify for services means they are not the same as a BIT. The BIT serves the entire school community, acting as a central repository and clearinghouse for potential issues and evaluating them to ensure students are getting what they need to thrive.