



**A SUCCESS
STORY**

TULARE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Creating an SEL Community



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Providing the Skills to Thrive

Javier Gomez, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) coordinator for the Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District in Tulare County, California, joined his former school district as a counselor in 2015. He was familiar with Second Step® programs after time spent as a probation officer, when he often taught gang-prevention curricula in schools across the Central Valley. Given his positive experiences with Second Step programs, Gomez was excited to learn that the Cutler-Orosi district was implementing Second Step® Elementary.

At the time, the small, rural district was implementing Second Step Elementary as a Tier 2 intervention. The district had recently identified several behavioral incidents where bullying had been reported, but upon investigation, the incidents were classified as mutual conflict rather than actual bullying behavior. District leaders hoped Second Step Elementary would provide students with tools to resolve conflicts, as well as recognize and appropriately respond to bullying behaviors when they did arise.

As part of the Tier 2 Second Step implementation, Gomez was tasked with teaching lessons to groups of five or six students at a time. However, in his previous experience with Second Step programs, he had particularly admired one district's use of the programs as Tier 1 interventions. "Through Second Step [programs], the district was using social-emotional learning as a preventative rather than a disciplinary approach," Gomez says. "Teaching the curriculum schoolwide benefited all students, not just those deemed high-risk."

Gomez had a vision for the positive effects an expanded implementation, reaching all students, could have on the district. When he presented this vision to school leadership, they gave their full support.



Javier Gomez
PBIS Coordinator
Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District



Building a Collaborative Climate

Cutler Elementary School Principal Leanne Cerda tasked Gomez with starting a pilot program teaching Second Step® Elementary and the Second Step® Bullying Prevention Unit as Tier 1 interventions for students in Grade 4 (the grade in which the most disciplinary referrals had been generated). The pilot was a success, with data showing a significant reduction in problem behaviors. The following year, Gomez was given the green light to convert Second Step Elementary and the Bullying Prevention Unit to Tier 1 interventions throughout the school.

To earn support from the school community, Gomez first presented data from the fourth-grade pilot program. "The key for us was to get buy-in from our staff," says Gomez. "They were receptive from the start, especially after seeing data from the pilot program."

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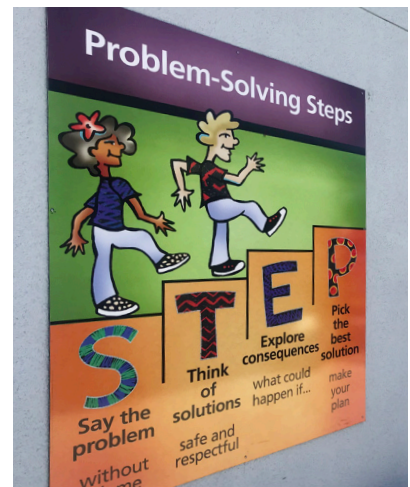
Javier Gomez | PBIS Coordinator | Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District

The next step was training teachers, along with select staff members who would help reinforce Second Step lessons outside of class. In the mornings, the principal reminded students about the Three Rs of Bullying as they prepared to start their day. Gomez and Principal Cerda put up Second Step posters around campus as a visual reminder of program concepts for both students and staff. Involving the entire school community ultimately produced a collaborative, supportive climate.

"We created an environment that provides our entire school population with critical social-emotional skills and knowledge, and also offers small-group interventions for students who need additional or more-specific support," says Gomez.



Leanne Cerda
Principal
Cutler Elementary School



A Community of Support

Today, Second Step® programs support schools across the Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District with K–8 districtwide integration under the direction of Antonio Quintanilla, director of special services. Over the three years that Cutler Elementary implemented schoolwide Tier 1 interventions, disciplinary referrals across grade levels dropped from 167 to 95. In addition, data reflects that problem behaviors schoolwide have reduced significantly, with Cutler Elementary meeting both of its identified SMART goals developed to decrease problem behaviors and improve school climate: Office discipline referrals dropped from 117 in the 2017–2018 school year to 105 in the 2018–2019 school year, and the number of students who received two or more office discipline referrals dropped from 97 at the end of the 2017–2018 school year to 82 at the end of the 2018–2019 school year.

Beyond the data, Gomez sees growth in his students. He says they show kindness toward one another and are learning to manage strong emotions and resolve problems. “Our vision is to develop great citizens, and with Second Step [programs] we’re providing them with the skills they need to thrive,” he says.

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Javier Gomez | PBIS Coordinator | Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District

The Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District will continue to make data-driven decisions, adjusting its Second Step program implementation based on the specific needs of its students. For Gomez, the next step is developing an action plan with customized one-on-one and group interventions for when students need more personalized support, such as using Second Step concepts to address situations like divorce or the loss of a family member.

Gomez also plans to further educate and involve families within the district. “We want to make sure these skills aren’t just being provided to our students,” he says. “We’re looking to build a community of support for social-emotional learning.”



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