

# Alternatives to Suspension

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines alternatives to suspension with an emphasis on special education students. Hanover first reviews literature on suspension and then addresses best practices in preventing and providing alternatives to suspension.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTION

In this report, Hanover Research evaluates the current literature surrounding *out-of-school* suspension, with particular regard to disability status and race, and then addresses common alternatives to suspension and intervention strategies to reduce suspension. Sources agree that students with disabilities are suspended more frequently than non-disabled students, while students of color, particularly African American students, are suspended more frequently than white students. Highlighting where these two groups intersect, according to a study released in August 2012, 25 percent of African American students with disabilities were suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 school year,<sup>1</sup> the most at-risk population evaluated.

As one source observes, “most school discipline plans are reactive and punitive, rather than proactive.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, suspension is not typically accompanied with either instruction or intervention to encourage positive behaviors. Further sources discussed throughout this report show significant evidence that suspension can negatively impact students, schools, districts, and surrounding communities.

Below, we present the key findings of our research regarding school and district efforts to reduce the use of suspension and implement alternative disciplinary approaches.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Available literature and practices adopted by successful schools suggest that a fundamental step to reducing the number of suspensions is a school’s formal recognition of the problem. Schools and districts can then seek to relegate suspensions to the position of a measure of last resort, as well as treat it as a punishment for very specific categories of offences—generally involving possession of a weapon or illegal drugs at school. Nationwide, students are most often suspended for committing lesser infractions, especially for expressing defiance toward authority figures, fighting, and creating a disruption in class. Evidence suggests that zero-tolerance policies result in greater numbers of suspensions than decisions left to the discretion of administrators based on individual circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> Losen, Daniel J. and Jonathan Gillespie. “Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School.” August 2012. The Civil Rights Project. Pg. 16. <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/upcoming-crrr-research/losen-gillespie-opportunity-suspended-crrr-2012.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Brunette, Andrew W. “Proactive Approaches for Reducing School Suspensions.” May 23, 2010. Northern Michigan University. Pg. 4. [http://www.nmu.edu/sites/DrupalEducation/files/UserFiles/Files/Pre-Drupal/SiteSections/Students/GradPapers/Projects/Brunette\\_Andrew\\_MP.pdf](http://www.nmu.edu/sites/DrupalEducation/files/UserFiles/Files/Pre-Drupal/SiteSections/Students/GradPapers/Projects/Brunette_Andrew_MP.pdf)

- A recent, comprehensive study of suspension data from the U.S. Department of Education reveals that 13 percent of students with disabilities were suspended in 2009-2010, nearly twice the percentage of suspensions for students without disabilities. Those at greatest risk for suspension were African American students with disabilities—in 2009-2010, one in four of these students were suspended at least once. Finally, students with disabilities (of all races) were more likely than their non-disabled peers to be suspended two or more times.<sup>3</sup>
- Suspension has been linked to negative consequences for individual students, schools, districts, and communities. In removing misbehaving students from the classroom, especially those with disabilities, schools deny education to the students who need it most.
- A recommended approach to school discipline that has been widely supported for working with students with disabilities, as well as other types of students, is School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). SWPBS is a proactive, tiered program for preventing problem behaviors that offers universal supports for all students coupled with more intensive supports for small groups and individual students.
- One of the hallmarks of the SWPBS approach is the setting of basic behavioral expectations for students and establishing a school culture where everyone is aware of the expectations and how to meet them. School personnel model these behaviors with students and acknowledge when students display appropriate behaviors as a means of positive reinforcement. Students requiring more intensive interventions may participate in small-group interventions such as a Check-in/Check-out program that features daily contact with a staff member and continual reminders of appropriate behavior. More serious cases may prompt a functional behavioral assessment to determine the root cause of the behavior and the development of an individualized behavior intervention plan.
- Other alternatives to suspension include peer mediation programs, “circles” where students and teachers discuss behavior and other issues as a group, behavior contracts, Saturday classes, and a “chill out/timeout” area that allows students to calm down and discuss an infraction with a school staff member. Additional alternatives are discussed throughout the report.

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<sup>3</sup> Losen. Op. cit.

## SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

In August 2012, the Civil Rights Project at UCLA released what it describes as the first comprehensive study on suspension practices in American public schools. “Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School”<sup>4</sup> analyzes data released by the Department of Education for the 2009-2010 school year, the most recent information available. Overall, as *The New York Times* reports, “students with disabilities are almost twice as likely to be suspended from school as nondisabled students, with the highest rates among black children with disabilities.”<sup>5</sup> In total, “well over three million children, K-12, are estimated to have lost instructional ‘seat time’ in 2009-2010 because they were suspended from school, often with no guarantee of adult supervision outside the school.”<sup>6</sup> Additional research indicates that suspension and expulsion occur more often at the middle and high school level than at the elementary school level, urban schools suspend students with greater frequency than do suburban schools or rural schools, and boys are more likely to be suspended than girls.<sup>7</sup>

### SUSPENSION, RACE, AND DISABILITY STATUS

The following figures are national statistics compiled by the Civil Rights Project on the percentage of students suspended, first by race and then by race and disability status. Note that the report produces additional information at the state and district level, which Hanover Research does not address at this time, given the scope of our current project. As the report states, the evidence below indicates that **students with disabilities and students of color, especially African American students, are disproportionately impacted by suspension policies.**

As depicted in Figure 1.1, 17 percent of African American students from kindergarten through twelfth grade were suspended at least once in 2009-2010. This figure represents one out of every six African American children enrolled in the American public school system. The suspension rate for African American students was much higher than for any other category. In comparison, eight percent of American Indian students were suspended in 2009-2010 (one in 13), seven percent of Latino students (one in 14), five percent of white students (one in 20), and two percent of Asian and Pacific Islander students (one in 50).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

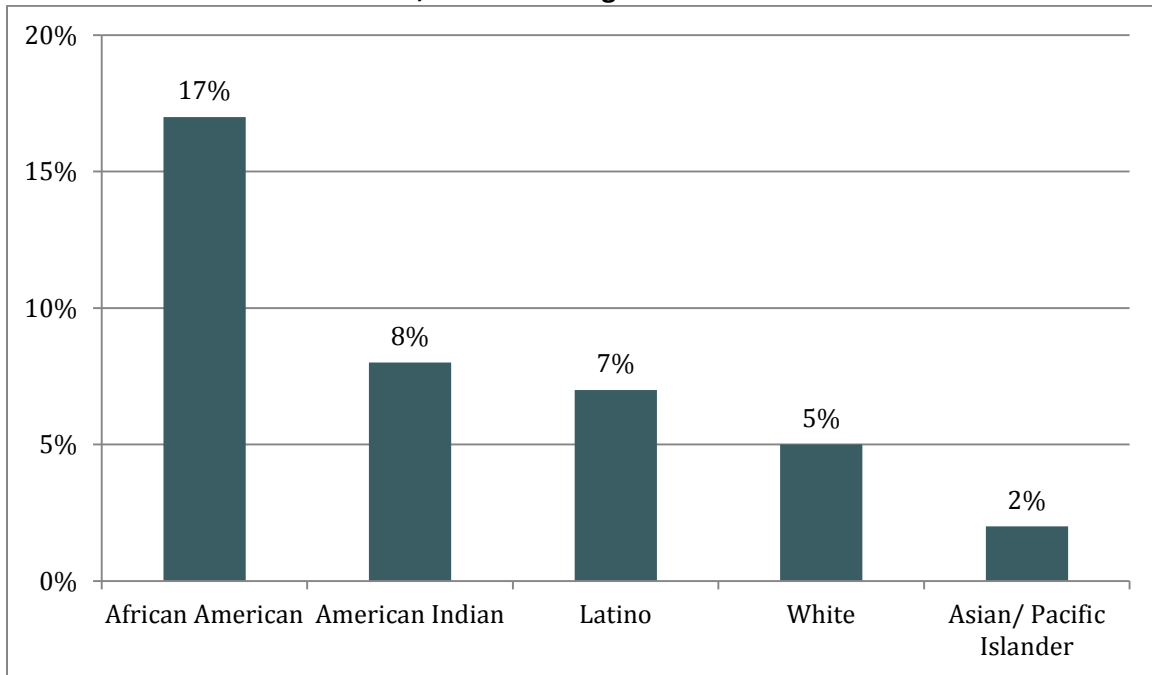
<sup>5</sup> Rich, Motoko. “Suspensions Are Higher for Disabled Students, Federal Data Indicate.” August 7, 2012. *The New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/education/analysis-examines-disabled-students-suspensions.html?\\_r=1&hpw](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/education/analysis-examines-disabled-students-suspensions.html?_r=1&hpw)

<sup>6</sup> Losen. Op. cit, pg. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Skiba, Russell and Jeffery Sprague. “Safety Without Suspensions.” September 2008. Educational Leadership. [http://www.pbis.org/common/cms/documents/Coach\\_Trainer/Articles/Safety%20Without%20Suspensions.pdf](http://www.pbis.org/common/cms/documents/Coach_Trainer/Articles/Safety%20Without%20Suspensions.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Losen. Op. cit, pg. 7-8.

**Figure 1.1: Students Suspended (Out-of-School) at Least Once During the 2009-2010 School Year, as a Percentage of Total Enrollment<sup>9</sup>**

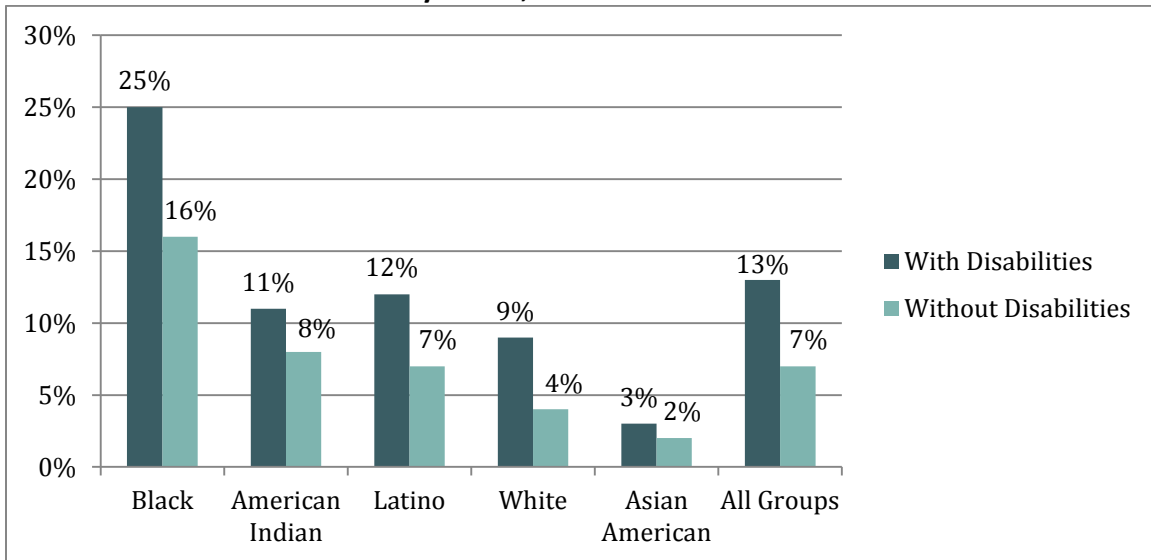


Source: The Civil Rights Project

Figure 1.2 examines the percentage of students suspended in the 2009-2010 school year by both race and disability status. Nationwide, **13 percent of students with disabilities were suspended in 2009-2010, nearly twice the figure of students suspended without disabilities (seven percent)**. One in four black children with disabilities, 25 percent, were suspended in the 2009-2010 school year, in comparison to 16 percent of black children without a disability. Students with disabilities were more likely to be suspended across all racial categories, with the greatest disparity for black students (nine percentage point difference between those with disabilities and those without), Latino students (five percentage points) and White students (five percentage points).

<sup>9</sup> Total enrollment of each race/ethnicity category (e.g., 17 percent of all African American students were suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 school year). Additionally, note that The Civil Rights Project report uses the category “Black” and “African American” interchangeably. Ibid, pg. 16.

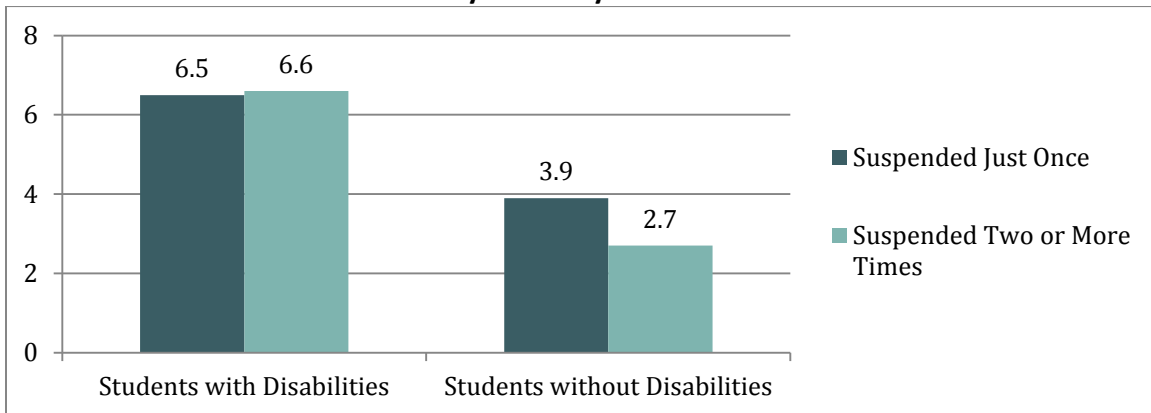
**Figure 1.2: Percentage of Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions, by Race and Disability Status, 2009-2010 School Year<sup>10</sup>**



Source: The Civil Rights Project

Figure 1.3 explores the percentage of students suspended either once or more than once by disability status. Nationwide, 6.5 percent of students with disabilities were suspended once in 2009-2010, while a slightly higher percentage, 6.6, were suspended two or more times. In comparison, 3.9 percent of students without disabilities were suspended once, a greater number than students without disabilities suspended more than once, 2.7 percent.

**Figure 1.3: National Comparison of Risks for Students Suspended Once or Multiple Times, by Disability Status<sup>11</sup>**



Source: The Civil Rights Project

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 16

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg. 17.

Figure 1.4 presents data for students suspended two or more times, broken down by race and disability status. Students with disabilities were more likely to be suspended multiple times than students without disabilities across all racial groups. African American students with disabilities were at the greatest risk overall, with 14 percent suspended two or more times over the 2009-2010 school year, in comparison to 7.4 percent of African American students without disabilities.

**Figure 1.4: Risk for Two or More Out-of-School Suspensions by Race and Disability<sup>12</sup>**

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL SUBGROUP ENROLLED (NATIONAL SAMPLE) SUSPENDED TWO OR MORE TIMES		
STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY	STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES
African American	14.0%	7.4%
American Indian	5.6%	3.2%
Latino	5.9%	2.5%
White	4.1%	1.5%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.3%	0.6%

Source: The Civil Rights Project

### VIOLATIONS PROMPTING SUSPENSION

There is a common misconception that suspension is used as a punishment of last resort, typically in response to students in possession of illegal drugs or weapons at school. Several studies, reviewed below, reveal that **suspension is far more commonly used in response to students defying authority, causing a disruption in class, or fighting**. Suspension due to drug and weapon-related offences is much less common.

A study in a large school district which enrolled 138,000 racially and economically diverse students in 142 schools determined the following breakdown in behaviors leading to suspension:<sup>13</sup>

- 20 percent due to disobedience/insubordination
- 13 percent due to disruption
- 13 percent due to fighting
- 11 percent due to inappropriate behavior
- Seven percent due to noncompliance with assigned discipline
- Seven percent due to profanity
- Six percent due to disrespect

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pg. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Brunette. Op. cit, pg. 15.



Overall, the least frequent behaviors leading to suspension were weapons possession at 0.7 percent, narcotics possession at 0.6 percent, sexual harassment at 0.6 percent, and alcohol possession at 0.3 percent. According to the source, “These findings suggest most suspensions were for relatively minor violations and not the result of the types of behaviors (weapons and drug possession) targeted by zero tolerance policies.”<sup>14</sup>

A study of suspension data in Kentucky public schools from the 2000-2001 school year revealed the following characteristics of more than 68,000 suspensions statewide:<sup>15</sup>

- 37 percent due to defiance of authority
- 25 percent due to fighting
- 12 percent due to class disturbance
- 10 percent due to failure to attend detention
- Nine percent due to profanity

According to the study, weapons-related suspensions, at one percent, ranked ninth in suspensions by category.<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with the two studies cited above, an analysis at an urban Midwestern high school revealed that most disciplinary referrals were “related to student behaviors that threatened the authority of teachers, as opposed to more serious violations of school policy.”<sup>17</sup>

An **increase in zero tolerance policies**, defined as “a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context,”<sup>18</sup> are **correlated to an increase in the number of suspensions**, because the individual discretion of school administrators is removed from the discipline process. Following are a handful of examples of questionable suspensions resulting from zero-tolerance policies, all occurring in 1999:<sup>19</sup>

- A seventh grade student in Glendale, Arizona, was suspended for the remainder of the school term after bringing a homemade rocket made from a potato chip container to school.
- A sophomore in Pensacola, Florida was given a ten-day suspension and threatened with expulsion for bringing nail clippers with an attached file to school.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pg. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pg. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg. 10.

- A five year old student at Curtisville Elementary School in Deer Lakes, Pennsylvania was suspended for bringing a five-inch plastic axe to school as part of his fireman Halloween costume.
- A freshman in Ewing, New Jersey was suspended until agreeing to submit to a drug test, following a teacher’s accusation after the student fell asleep in class.
- A sophomore in Westlake High School in Waldorf, Maryland received a ten-day suspension after stating in the morning announcements that his French teacher was not fluent in French.

## SUSPENSION AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

The Civil Rights Project’s analysis cites substantial research indicating that **“frequent out-of-school suspension does not produce better learning environments, deter future misbehavior, or stimulate effective parental involvement”**<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence that suspension produces positive outcomes in students, schools, districts, or communities, though there is evidence that suspension **produces negative outcomes** among all four populations. As the Civil Rights Project states, “research links suspensions with higher risk for retention in grade, dropping out, and involvement with the juvenile justice system, even after controlling for race, poverty, and school characteristics.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, according to a recent article in *The New York Times*, suspensions “often presage dropouts and can raise a child’s risk of future incarceration. Districts with high suspension rates also tend to be correlated with lower student achievement as measured by test scores.”<sup>22</sup> Exclusion from school on disciplinary grounds is criticized by the American Psychological Association and on health and safety grounds by the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>23</sup>

The Minnesota Department of Education cites the following outcomes for students who are suspended, drawing from a wide range of studies on the subject:<sup>24</sup>

- Higher rates of misbehavior
- Lower academic achievement
- Drop-out and school failure
- Restricted access to school services such as counseling and social skills instruction
- Feelings of alienation, anxiety, rejection, diminished self-esteem, withdrawal
- Feeling unwelcome at school

<sup>20</sup> Losen, Op. cit, pg. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pg. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Rich. Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Losen. Op. cit, pg. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted from source: “Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheet: Outcomes of Out-of-School Suspension.” October 2011. Minnesota Department of Education.  
[http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=17&ved=0CGwQFjAGOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Feducation.state.mn.us%2Fmdeprod%2Fidcplg%3FidcService%3DGET\\_FILE%26dDocName%3D004674%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary&ei=mOkfUOzVJejo6wGB1oCIDA&usg=AFQjCNEyEJPWubGwThQfMsmjw\\_xJNKBw-Q&sig2=OBuaDMg7uzJimEBWOLqYag](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=17&ved=0CGwQFjAGOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Feducation.state.mn.us%2Fmdeprod%2Fidcplg%3FidcService%3DGET_FILE%26dDocName%3D004674%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary&ei=mOkfUOzVJejo6wGB1oCIDA&usg=AFQjCNEyEJPWubGwThQfMsmjw_xJNKBw-Q&sig2=OBuaDMg7uzJimEBWOLqYag)

- Harm to healthy adult relationships
- Unsupervised time and increased opportunity for delinquency

With regard to the impact on schools, the Minnesota Department of Education refers to research which identifies “lower academic achievement; diminished relationships with families and communities; loss of average daily attendance; and lower ratings of school governance.”<sup>25</sup> All such outcomes appear out of line with goals of improving school performance and student behavior.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## SECTION II: ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION

In the second section of this report, Hanover Research reviews best practices in alternatives to suspension. In particular, we discuss **two comprehensive approaches to managing student behavior** that have been highlighted as successful alternatives to suspension – School-Wide Positive Behavior Support and Restorative Justice. This is followed by a look at **two grant-funded projects involving multiple schools** that have implemented suspension alternatives – North Carolina’s Project EASE and Minnesota’s Alternatives-to-Suspension Grant. As we will see in our discussion, the grant-funded projects share elements of the two comprehensive approaches and illustrate their practical applications in school settings.

Please note that **while a number of these practices have been recommended for working with students with disabilities, all have been applied to other student populations** and may support positive behavioral outcomes throughout the school. Further, additional practices are presented in the Appendix of this report.

### SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT (SWPBS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), commonly referred to as **School-Wide Positive Behavior Support** (SWPBS, as we refer to it in this report) when applied at the school level,<sup>26</sup> is a **proactive approach to problem behavior prevention, supported by additional interventions for small groups and individual students with further needs.**<sup>27</sup> The approach is strongly supported by the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS TA Center), established by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. While SWPBS has been frequently discussed in the context of supporting students with disabilities, it is promoted as a successful approach to all types of students.<sup>28</sup>

Though “no two school-based programs will look alike,”<sup>29</sup> SWPBS features a series of key elements. In a 2005 article discussing the approach, two of the co-directors of the PBIS TA Center – George Sugai and Robert Horner, along with support from Claudia Vincent – explained these elements, summarized below.<sup>30</sup>

- **Prevention** – Schools should seek to prevent problem behavior rather than responding to misconduct after it occurs. According to the authors, this is a “more

<sup>26</sup> “SWPBIS for Beginners.” National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. [http://www.pbis.org/about\\_us/default.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/about_us/default.aspx)

<sup>27</sup> Horner, Robert, George Sugai, and Claudia Vincent. “School-wide Positive Behavior Support: Investing in Student Success.” *Impact: Feature Issue on Fostering Success in School and Beyond for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders*. 2005. pg. 4. <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/182/182.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> “About Us.” National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. [http://www.pbis.org/about\\_us/default.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/about_us/default.aspx)

<sup>29</sup> “Effective Schoolwide Discipline in Virginia: A Statewide Initiative that Provides Positive Behavioral and Academic Supports to All Students.” Virginia Department of Education. June 2007. [http://ttac.odu.edu/esd/documents/ESD\\_Manual.pdf](http://ttac.odu.edu/esd/documents/ESD_Manual.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Horner, Sugai, and Vincent, Op. cit., pg. 4.

effective, cost-efficient, and productive” approach to student behavior than traditional, reactive methods.

- **School Culture and Behavioral Expectations** – Children should be taught appropriate social behavior in the school setting, as they may come from different backgrounds where social expectations vary. As the authors explain, “schools must define the core social expectations (e.g., be respectful, be responsible, be safe), and overtly teach the behaviors and skills associated with these expectations.”<sup>31</sup> This will form the basis for a school social culture, where every student knows the established social expectations.
- **Recognition of Appropriate Behavior** – Instances of appropriate student behavior should be recognized on a regular basis. Elsewhere this is described as a “gotcha” system, where students are “caught in the act” of behaving appropriately.<sup>32</sup>
- **Data** – Schools should carefully track data regarding student behavior and use it to inform decisions regarding approaches to problem behaviors.
- **Investment** – In addition to their focus on student behavior, schools and districts must invest in the personnel implementing SWPBS through the establishment of teams, policies, and data structures, as well as provide needed funding and administrative support.

While much of the above description largely applies to the preventive/proactive aspect of SWPBS, as noted earlier, the approach combines prevention with more targeted supports for students continually displaying problem behaviors. As such, SWPBS may be visualized in the form of a **three-tiered approach**, as illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 2.1: SWPBS – Tiered Framework of Behavioral Support**

TIER	DESCRIPTION
First Tier	The first tier represents supports for all of a district or school’s students. It primarily features “positively stated expectations, strategies to teach expectations, high rates of reinforcement for complying with expectations, and clear routines to increase the likelihood of success.”
Second Tier	Supports within the second tier are more targeted to small groups of students who need further interventions to achieve desired behavioral outcomes. Strategies used at this level include “small group instruction in self-management and social skill development as well as academic support in groups.”
Third Tier	The third tier encompasses supports for individual students displaying chronic behavioral problems. The main feature of this level is the “functional behavioral assessment” which forms the basis for the development of an “individualized positive behavior support plan.”

Source: Lewis, 2005.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Primary Prevention.” National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. [http://www.pbis.org/school/primary\\_level/default.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/school/primary_level/default.aspx)

This three-tiered approach is **well-aligned with Response to Intervention (RTI) practices**, where instruction and interventions are closely coordinated with the needs of individual students, and student data are widely used to inform decision making. Both SWPBS and RTI “are grounded in differentiated instruction” and delineate student supports along the lines of universal, secondary, and tertiary interventions.<sup>34</sup>

While the PBIS TA Center offers an expansive set of resources regarding the implementation of SWPBS, below we provide additional details of key elements of the first, second, and third tiers of support.

### *SETTING BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS AND RECOGNIZING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR (FIRST TIER)*

As noted above, supports within the first tier are implemented for all students in a school or district and seek to prevent problem behaviors before they occur. According to the PBIS TA Center the focus of the first tier is a set of “rules, routines, and physical arrangements” established by the school staff to prevent specific negative behaviors. The Center recommends that a team of school representatives – including administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers – **develop three to five behavioral expectations** that can be easily remembered. Each expectation **targets a negative behavior but restates it in a positive manner** (e.g., “Respect Yourself, Respect Others, and Respect Property” or “Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful”).<sup>35</sup>

The team will next determine how students should meet these expectations in various settings. For example, specific behaviors associated with “Respect Property” would include “keeping feet and hands where they belong” on the bus, “wiping table with sponge provided” in the cafeteria, and “returning playground equipment to the proper area” on the playground. The PBIS TA Center recommends that the team develop a matrix displaying each setting and associated examples of appropriate behavior, and present them to the rest of the school staff for approval.

Once the team has achieved staff buy-in of the behavioral expectations, the SWPBS approach requires **teaching the expectations to students**. While there are a variety of means available to accomplish this task, some schools have elected to set aside time at the beginning of the school year to take students to various “stations” around the school to demonstrate the expected behaviors. For example, as the PBIS TA Center explains, “a bus may be brought to the school and the children will practice lining up, entering the bus,

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, Timothy J. “Implementing School-wide Positive Behavior Supports.” *Impact: Feature Issue on Fostering Success in School and Beyond for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders*. 2005. pg. 26. <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/182/182.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> “Response to Intervention (RTI) & PBIS.” National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. <http://www.pbis.org/school/rti.aspx>

<sup>35</sup> “SWPBS for Beginners.” National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Op. cit.

sitting on the bus, and exiting the bus using hula hoops to denote proper body space distance in lining up to enter the bus.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the school’s SWPBS team will determine how to **recognize students meeting the behavioral expectations**. For example, some schools hand out “gotchas” – pieces of paper – recognizing that the student is behaving appropriately. The Center explains that “specific praise is extremely important in increasing the reoccurrence of appropriate behavior.”<sup>37</sup>

### *CHECK IN/CHECK OUT (SECOND TIER)*

For students who do not respond to first tier supports – defined as “students who visit the office between 2 and 5 times per year,”<sup>38</sup> students receiving several minor referrals, and/or students who exhibit problem behavior that is not dangerous<sup>39</sup> – more targeted interventions may be necessary. One example of a second tier intervention is **Check In/Check Out (CICO)**, also referred to as the Behavior Education Program (BEP). In a 2010 publication of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders, researchers from the University of Connecticut and Assumption College outline CICO in the following manner:<sup>40</sup>

Students check in with an adult in the morning, obtain a point sheet that they carry throughout the school day and use to gather performance feedback from teachers (in the form of points and positive comments), and check out with an adult at the end of the day. A token economy is used in conjunction with the CICO system; students earn tokens (e.g., points, bucks) for meeting their individualized, predetermined point percentage goal for that day. Tokens can be accumulated and are eventually exchanged for preferred backup reinforcers (e.g., activities, privileges, or tangible items).

The above activities are coupled with **regular parent communication** and **teacher/ staff reviews of student progress**. Providing an example of the latter, the Michigan Department of Education’s Office of Special Education recommends that bi-weekly meetings should be held to evaluate data regarding the progress of CICO participants. The data are then used to determine whether the student is ready to exit the program or whether the program should be revised.<sup>41</sup> Commenting on the strengths of the program, a presentation by the Office explains that the **students receive prompts/reminders throughout the school day regarding appropriate behavior**, as well as **regular feedback and rewards** for correct

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Secondary Level – Frequently Asked Questions.” National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.  
[http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary\\_level/faqs.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary_level/faqs.aspx)

<sup>39</sup> “Targeted Behavior Interventions – Check-in/Check-out Introduction.” Michigan Department of Education. December 2009. pg. 7. <http://miblsi.cenmi.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=znbJrNL439Y%3d&tabid=739>

<sup>40</sup> Myers, Diane M., Donald E. Briere III, and Brandi Simonsen. “Lessons Learned from Implementing a Check-in/Check-out Behavioral Program in an Urban Middle School.” *Beyond Behavior*. 2010.  
<http://www.ccbd.net/sites/default/files/bebe-19-02-21.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> “Check In Check Out (CICO).” Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education.  
<http://miblsi.cenmi.org/MiBLSiModel/Implementation/ElementarySchools/TierIIISupports/Behavior/TargetBehaviorInterventions/CheckInCheckOut.aspx>

behavior. As such, the approach works particularly well for students who are seeking attention from adults.<sup>42</sup>

The University of Connecticut and Assumption College researchers cite multiple studies demonstrating the positive effects of CICO on social behavior at the elementary and middle school levels, while an additional study has shown positive effects at the high school level when coupling the program with academic tutoring.<sup>43</sup> Further, CICO programs are promoted by the PBIS TA center as an effective second tier support.<sup>44</sup>

### *FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT AND BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PLAN (THIRD TIER)*

Finally, the third tier of support focuses on students who exhibit more severe and/or chronic behavioral problems. Supports at this level are typically comprised of two elements: (1) a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) designed to better understand the behavior and (2) the development of an individualized plan of intervention strategies, sometimes referred to as a behavior support plan (BSP) or behavioral intervention plan (BIP).

Regarding when third tier supports come into play, a document prepared by the Maryland State Department of Education on effective practices of discipline for students with disabilities lays out situations in which a student's behavior should typically trigger an FBA.<sup>45</sup>

- Standard school or classroom management strategies have been ineffective
- The behavior occurs with a high level of intensity and/or frequency
- The student is at risk of exclusion and/or suspension
- A more restrictive placement or a more intrusive intervention is being considered

Further, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires a functional behavioral assessment and development of a behavioral intervention plan when a student with disabilities would be subject to suspension or other removal from his or her educational environment for an extended period of time.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "Targeted Behavior Interventions – Check-in/Check-out Introduction." Op. cit., pg. 7 and 18.

<sup>43</sup> For example, see: Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, and Lathrop. "Response to Intervention: Examining Classroom Behavior Support in Second Grade." *Exceptional Children*. 2007; Hawken. "School Psychologists as Leaders in the Implementation of a Targeted Intervention: The Behavior Education Program." *School Psychology Quarterly*. 2006; and Swain-Bradway. "An Evaluation of a Cohesive Secondary Level Intervention for High School Students at Risk of School Failure: The High School Behavior Education Plan." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oregon. 2009.

<sup>44</sup> "Secondary Level User Resources." National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.  
[http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary\\_level/user\\_resources.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary_level/user_resources.aspx)

<sup>45</sup> "Discipline of Students with Disabilities." Maryland State Department of Education. September 2009. pg. 11.  
[http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/5F4F5041-02EE-4F3A-B495-5E4B3C850D3E/22802/DisciplineofStudentswithDisabilities\\_September2009.pdf](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/5F4F5041-02EE-4F3A-B495-5E4B3C850D3E/22802/DisciplineofStudentswithDisabilities_September2009.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions – What is Tertiary Prevention?" National Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.  
[http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary\\_level/faqs.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary_level/faqs.aspx)



**An FBA is a process by which the school seeks to understand why a student is behaving in a certain manner.** More specifically, it has been described as “a systematic way of gathering information in order to determine a relationship between a child’s problem behavior and aspects of the environment.”<sup>47</sup> Such information may then be used to develop a plan of interventions to best meet the child’s needs. While the full details of implementation of an FBA and development of a BSP/BIP are beyond the scope of our current report, we provide a brief description of what the process involves.

If the school decides that third-level supports are necessary, a **support team of family, teachers, and other direct service providers** should be convened. Robert A. Gable, a professor of education at Old Dominion University, explains that the FBA process should then follow a series of steps including **definition of the behavioral problem, collection and analysis of data** around the problem that could explain the function of the behavior (e.g., “to get attention, avoid an aversive social situation, express anger or frustration”), **identification of a hypothesis** regarding the function/motivation of the behavior (e.g., “under condition X, the student does Y, in order to Z”), and **systematic testing of the hypothesis** by changing an aspect of the child’s instruction or environment.<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately the information yielded by this process will assist the team in **developing a plan of targeted intervention**. The team will then **monitor how the plan is implemented and assess its effectiveness**.<sup>49</sup>

According to the PBIS TA Center, the BSP/BIP may involve making “adjustments to the environment that reduce the likelihood of the problem; teaching replacement skills and building general competencies; consequences to promote positive behaviors and deter problems; and a crisis management plan (if needed).”<sup>50</sup> With regard to this last element, a crisis management plan may be necessary when severe episodes of the behavior occur and the safety of all individuals involved is in question. Such steps should draw on carefully planned procedures (developed in advance of the occurrence) and “focus on a rapid de-escalation of the behavior.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> “Teaching Students with Severe Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Best Practices Guide to Intervention.” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington. January 2005.  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/pubdocs/bestpractices.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Gable, Robert A. “Functional Assessment of Classroom Behavior Problems.” *Impact: Feature Issue on Fostering Success in School and Beyond for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders*. 2005. pg. 17.  
<http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/182/182.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions – What is Tertiary Prevention?” Op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Moving to another general approach to student behavior, restorative justice has been framed as a valuable “alternative to zero-tolerance policies that mandate suspension or expulsion”<sup>52</sup> that seeks to address student misbehavior while keeping students in school and holding them accountable for their actions. A 2010 presentation by the Minnesota Department of Education highlighted the differences between a more “standard” approach to discipline and a restorative approach, as presented in the following figure.<sup>53</sup>

**Figure 2.2: Standard/Formal Disciplinary System versus Restorative Approach**<sup>54</sup>

STANDARD/FORMAL SYSTEM	RESTORATIVE APPROACH
What was the rule and who broke it?	What was the harm and who was affected by it?
What is the punishment per the student handbook?	How do we make amends, repair the harm, re-connect all to community?
Administrator decision	Victim/Offender/Community decision

Source: Minnesota Department of Education.

As the figure above illustrates, **restorative approaches focus more on the practical consequences of misbehavior, rather than the specific rule that was broken.** The response to misbehavior seeks to make sure the offending student understands the consequences of his or her actions, allows the student to restore balance to the situation created by the misconduct, and therefore holds the student accountable for his or her actions. Restorative approaches further seek to involve those hurt by the actions and offer them “empowerment from being actively involved in the justice process.”<sup>55</sup>

**Restorative justice heavily utilizes dialogue between different parties involved in a conflict,** including the victim, the offender, and members of the impacted community. These meetings are an attempt to have the offender realize the effect of their behavior and address it, while providing the victim and community members the opportunity to voice

<sup>52</sup> “School-Based Restorative Justice as an Alternative to Zero-Tolerance Policies: Lessons from West Oakland.” Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice. University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. November 2010. [http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/11-2010\\_School-based\\_Restorative\\_Justice\\_As\\_an\\_Alternative\\_to\\_Zero-Tolerance\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/11-2010_School-based_Restorative_Justice_As_an_Alternative_to_Zero-Tolerance_Policies.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Riestenberg, Nancy. “Re-affirming, Repairing, and Re-building Relationships: Restorative Measures and Circles in Schools.” Minnesota Department of Education. 2010. <http://www.pacer.org/help/symposium/2010/pdf/Special%20Education%20and%20the%20Circle%20Process%20Using%20Restorative%20Principles%20with%20all%20Students,%20Nancy%20Riestenberg.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Hansen, Toran. “Restorative Justice Practices and Principles in Schools.” Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, University of Minnesota. September 2005. [http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/rjp/resources/rj\\_dialogue\\_resources/Other\\_Approaches/Restorative\\_Justice\\_in\\_Schools.pdf](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/rjp/resources/rj_dialogue_resources/Other_Approaches/Restorative_Justice_in_Schools.pdf)

suggestions for appropriate consequences. The dialogue helps heal the community and reduces likelihood of future behavior violations.<sup>56</sup>

Though all embody the main principles discussed above, practices associated with restorative justice may take a variety of forms. Examples of specific practices that have been used in schools include:

- **Victim-offender mediation** – A trained mediator facilitates a meeting between a student who has clearly broken school standards of conduct and the victim of his or her actions. The victim is prompted to share “their story of victimization with the offender,” enabling the offender to better understand the consequences of his or her actions. In addition to the mediator, other individuals supporting the victim and offender (e.g., family, teachers, or social workers) may also be invited to participate. The process will often result in a “restitution plan” to re-form relationships between victim and offender and make amends for the offender’s actions.
- **Peer mediation** – A process where student mediators are trained to facilitate meetings between students involved in a conflict. The conflict may or may not feature a “clear offender.”
- **Circles** – In this process, a group of students or a group of teachers and students sit in a circle. The group passes an item around the circle, indicating when it is an individual’s turn to talk while the others listen. The circle may be used to address situations similar to victim-offender mediation, as well as serve as a means to “create community in a classroom, reintegrate offenders into their school setting, to discuss academic concerns, or to accomplish any number of other group tasks.”<sup>57</sup>

Providing a concrete example of restorative justice in a school setting, the **San Francisco Board of Education implemented a restorative justice program in 2009** in an attempt “to find alternatives to suspension and expulsion.”<sup>58</sup> A March 2012 article discussing the program highlighted the use of “**Peer Courts**,” where students who have committed infractions meet with a group of their peers “to identify who has been hurt by the crime and then help [the offenders] make things right.”<sup>59</sup> As described above, the program also features “**circles**,” where students discuss behavioral problems with each other in class in order to find a resolution. Highlighting differences between restorative techniques and zero-tolerance policies, a member of San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors explained that rather than immediately removing a student from school, “in restorative justice, you have to actually have the offender and the victim sit down and discuss what happened and how the offender can make it better.”<sup>60</sup> While progress has varied by school, the article covering the

<sup>56</sup> “Alternatives to Suspension, Expulsion, and School-Based Arrest.” Op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> Hanson, Op. cit. pg. 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, Jeremy Adam. “Can Restorative Justice Keep Schools Safe?” The Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley. March 12, 2012.

[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can\\_restorative\\_justice\\_keep\\_schools\\_safe](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can_restorative_justice_keep_schools_safe)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

program noted that suspensions had decreased by 35 percent and expulsions had declined 28 percent since the program had been implemented.

Though details were not available, the **Minnesota Department of Education has specifically highlighted the application of restorative techniques to special education settings.**<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in an article regarding **alternatives to suspension for students with emotional/behavioral disorders**, Reece Peterson of the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, suggested **“in-kind restitution” and “mediation programs”** as viable alternatives for this group of students. In line with the discussion of restorative justice above, he explains that a restitution approach “permits the student to help to restore or improve the school environment by directly addressing the problems caused by the student’s behavior (e.g., in cases of vandalism students can work to repair things they damaged), or by having the student improve the school environment more broadly (e.g., picking up trash, washing lockers).”<sup>62</sup> Again similar to another feature of restorative justice programs, mediation programs may involve a students’ peers, “teach students about non-violent conflict resolution,” and allow students to practice such techniques in the school setting.<sup>63</sup>

### PROJECT EASE (EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION)

Next, we turn to examples of suspension alternatives implemented in the context of state grant programs. First, in August 2002 the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention—Center for the Prevention of School Violence (DJJDP-Center) began work on Project EASE (Educational Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion). The study was prompted by data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s Annual Report on Suspensions and Expulsions for the 2001-2002 school year, in which **out-of-school suspensions had caused over one million instructional days to be lost**. According to the study, the project’s main goals were “to identify, study, and implement promising strategies toward the reduction of suspension and expulsion rates in North Carolina’s public schools with regard to the disproportionate number of minorities being suspended and expelled.”<sup>64</sup>

Promising strategies were gathered from “guiding” sites, which had previously established alternative disciplinary approaches, and “implementing” sites, which were in the process of implementing strategies. All identified strategies were used as part of schools’ overall efforts to reduce discipline problems, with the ultimate goal of reducing suspension and expulsion rates. The report **divides promising strategies into five categories: Parental Involvement, Alternative Placement, School Climate, Leadership, and Staff Development,**

<sup>61</sup> Riestenberg, Op. cit., pg. 21.

<sup>62</sup> Peterson, Reece L. “Ten Alternatives to Suspension.” *Impact: Feature Issue on Fostering Success in School and Beyond for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders*. 2005. pg. 10.  
<http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/182/182.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pg. 11.

<sup>64</sup> “Project EASE (Educational Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion) Promising Strategies Document.” November 2003. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention—Center for the Prevention of School Violence.  
[http://www.ncdjdp.org/cpsv/toolkit/acrobat/project\\_ease.pdf](http://www.ncdjdp.org/cpsv/toolkit/acrobat/project_ease.pdf)

noting that strategies are sometimes placed in different categories according to the schools’ varying implementations. Overall, the study expressed the view that **“schools completing self-assessments, utilizing school and community resources, and selecting strong driven leaders have the process of reducing their suspension and expulsion rates in hand.”**<sup>65</sup>

The figures below are intended to illustrate the variety of strategies implemented at each “guiding site” involved in the project. Details regarding each strategy are provided later in this section.

**Figure 2.3: Strategies to Reduce Suspension by School Site: Guiding Sites**<sup>66</sup>

School Name	Parental Involvement	Alternative Placement	School Climate	Leadership	Staff Development
Burns Middle School	Social Worker	Behavior Intervention Center (BIC)	Eagle Dollars	Leadership by Example, Teacher-to-Teacher Mentors, Teacher Teams	--
Emma B. Trask Middle School	Project Re-Direct	Project Re-Direct	--	Teacher Teams, Leadership by Example	--
Glenwood Elementary School	Glad Calls, Social Worker, Direct Calls Home, Behavior Contract	--	Cultural Awareness, Glad Calls, Behavior Contract	Leadership by Example	Year-long Staff Development
Pamlico County High School	Saturday Academy Parents Meeting	Chill Out, Saturday Academy, In-School Suspension, Alternative Learning Program	Character Education/Leadership	Leadership by Example	--
Spring Lake Middle School	Behavior Contracts	--	Calendars with Rules	Teacher-to-Student Mentors, Leadership by Example	--

Source: DJJD-Center

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

There is substantial evidence that parental involvement in their children’s education has a strong impact on academic performance. All five guiding school sites had strategies to improve parental involvement as a means of handling behavior issues, using the following approaches: Saturday School, social workers, Project Re-Direct, direct calls home, and behavior contracts.<sup>67</sup>

- **Saturday School:** Pamlico County High School utilized Saturday School as an alternative to suspension and to increase parental involvement. In cases of student

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

misconduct that would normally trigger suspension, students were given the choice to attend Saturday School or serve out the suspension. The school contacted parents to inform them of the student's actions and choice, and parents needed to sign paperwork granting consent for students to attend Saturday School. Students who failed to attend Saturday School had to serve their assigned suspension. Additionally, the school called a conference with the parents, students, and administrators before the child could return to school.

- **Social Workers:** Both Glenwood Elementary School and Burns Middle School use social workers to involve parents, focusing on home visits, providing transportation to meet administrators, and allowing more flexible meeting times for parents. Social workers visit the homes of struggling students to discuss problem behavior with parents, including possible strategies to reduce negative behavior. Additionally, when discussing reasons for parents' failure to appear at scheduled meetings with school administration, the schools discovered that transportation was a frequent problem. Social workers began picking parents up at assigned locations, driving them to school, and dropping them off afterwards.
- **Project Re-Direct:** Project Re-Direct is an alternative-to-suspension program at Emma B. Trask Middle School (discussed more fully in the Alternative Placement section below) which incorporates substantial communication with parents. Parents must meet with the school principal and the Project Re-Direct teacher to discuss the reason the student was placed in the program, the program's rules, and what the student will accomplish through the program. If any problems arise during the program's duration, the teacher communicates with the parents about the issue. Additionally, parents pick up and drop off students from the program.
- **Direct Calls Home:** Glenwood Elementary School has two programs for calling parents at home: initial calls at the beginning of the school year and "glad calls." At the beginning of the school year school staff contact every student's home in an attempt to establish lines of communication with parents and engender a positive relationship between the school and parents. The parents of students nominated for good behavior receive "glad calls." This call has two purposes: first, to develop a positive relationship between the school and parents, and second, for the unexpected call to allow parents to share the positive news with their coworkers. The calls are made while parents are at work for this reason. "Glad calls" are also discussed in the School Climate/Positive Recognition section below.
- **Behavior Contracts:** Both Glenwood Elementary School and Spring Lake Middle School use behavior contracts for students who are at-risk or have been suspended, in attempt to avoid future suspensions. Students meet with counselors or administrators to discuss the causes of bad behavior or previous suspensions, strategies students can use to avoid bad behavior in the future, and consequences for breaking the behavior contract. The student writes down agreed-upon alternative behaviors and consequences, signs the contract, and then obtains a parent's signature at home. If broken, parents and administrators review the contract in a conference and implement relevant consequences.

### *ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENT*

Alternative Placement is intended for students who misbehave in class, but do not commit action warranting suspension, and for students who commit an infraction meriting a short-term suspension. Four school sites provide alternative placement programs, which remove students from the classroom but allow them to continue their educations, while examining the behavior which resulted in the students' placement in the program. Methods utilized are Chill Out/Timeout, Behavior Intervention Center, Saturday School, Project Re-Direct, and Genesis.<sup>68</sup>

- **Chill Out/Timeout:** Both Pamlico County High School and Burns Middle School have chill out and timeout rooms, led by either a licensed teacher or another staff member. Classroom teachers may send misbehaving students to this room, where the student remains for the rest of the class period. Upon arrival in the chill out/timeout room, the chill out/timeout teacher allows a student to calm down and then discusses what happened in the classroom with the student, along with possible alternate behavior choices. At the conclusion of the academic period, or when the student has regained composure, the student rejoins the academic day. In the next few days the classroom teacher discusses the misbehavior with the offending student. Both schools keep regularly reviewed records of use of the chill out/timeout room, to track the number of times a student is sent, the frequency with which classes send students, and the reason for placement.
- **Behavior Intervention Center (BIC):** Burns Middle School's Behavior Intervention Center is used after multiple sessions in the chill out/timeout room have failed to change a student's behavior. A licensed counselor oversees the small classroom, located inside the school, which a student attends for the remainder of the school day. The focus is on changing the student's behaviors and working on assigned schoolwork.
- **Saturday School:** Pamlico County High School established Saturday School as an alternative to short-term suspension, as previously discussed in the Parental Involvement section. Participation is voluntary, and students choose whether to accept a short-term suspension or spend one day in Saturday School. Students are only allowed to utilize Saturday School as an option once a year. Saturday School lasts four hours and is overseen by a certified teacher and a former United States Marine. Students first clean up the school or engage in another physical activity, and then work on assigned schoolwork. The instructor talks to each student individually about the behavior for which they were placed in Saturday School and different choices they can make in the future.
- **Project Re-Direct:** Introduced above, Project Re-Direct was established at Emma B. Trask Middle School as an alternative to short-term suspension. A licensed teacher operates the program, which meets for half a school day in an isolated, on-site classroom. Students in the program focus on academics and on behavior, benefiting from individualized attention. The teacher discusses the behaviors which resulted in

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

placement in the program individually with each student, along with alternative actions that could have been taken. Students may attend Project Re-Direct no more than once a school year, and students committing further comparable offenses are suspended. As noted above, the program involves substantial communication with parents.

- **Genesis:** Perquimans County High School (one of the “implementing” sites) established Genesis as an alternative-learning program for students receiving short- or long-term suspensions. The program is housed in a mobile unit on school grounds and overseen by a staff member working towards teacher certification. In the program students are taught either one-on-one with the instructor or through the computerized education program NovaNET. Students also take a career aptitude test, research career fields, and complete a project in a career field of interest. Finally, the Genesis coordinator and student meet one-on-one to discuss how to improve the student’s behavior and avoid suspensions in the future.

### *SCHOOL CLIMATE*

Four schools involved in the grant worked to create school environments where positive behavior is part of the culture, mainly through celebrating differences between students, reinforcing a sense of community, and recognizing positive student actions (similar to SWPBS). Sites improved their school environments through In-School Positive Recognition Programs, Glad Calls, Cultural Awareness, Student Planners, and student artwork.<sup>69</sup>

- **In-School Positive Recognition Programs:** Pamlico County High School and Burns Middle School recognize positive student actions through rewards for outstanding behavior. Students at Pamlico are rewarded with tickets to athletic and school events, with school merchandise, or with donated prizes from community members. At Burns, students are rewarded with Eagle Dollars, named for the school mascot. Students may choose to receive a small prize immediately or save tickets to compete for a larger prize at the end of the month.
- **Glad Calls:** Glenwood Elementary School teachers nominate students with good behavior to receive “glad calls,” previously discussed in the Parental Involvement section of this report. Reinforcing positive actions encourages students to strive for consistent good behavior.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Glenwood Elementary School, an extremely diverse institution, works to recognize the cultures of students while identifying all students as members of the school community. The school hangs flags of all represented nations in the school hallways, recognizing students’ nations of origin, and refers to all students as “gators”—deriving from the school mascot—and refers to school rules as “gator rules” and the “gator plan.” The gator plan is posted in hallways and classrooms and frequently reviewed by teachers.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



- **Student Planners:** Spring Lake Middle School distributes yearly student planners containing important information, including the school rules and code of conduct. All students receive a copy of the planner at the beginning of the year and review its contents with their teachers. The rules outlined in the planner are used as a familiar point of reference to justify rules and consequences to misbehaving students.
- **Student Artwork:** Students at Mendenhall Middle School create murals in school halls every year to encourage school pride. Designed by students in art class, the school provides art supplies to complete the project. After completion, murals are displayed for the student body, faculty and staff, and visitors to the school.

### *LEADERSHIP*

All Project EASE sites promote strong school leadership, recognizing the need to reduce suspension and expulsion rates and taking action to address this need. Improving school leadership at the sites was accomplished through leadership by example and leadership through mentors.<sup>70</sup>

- **Leadership by Example:** The principal of Burns Middle School sets a strong example for the school community beginning with an explanation of expectations at the first staff meeting of the school year, giving administrators and staff the opportunity to review the expectations and provide feedback. The school has a strong leadership presence in school hallways. In interviews, teachers cited clear rules and expectations for all members of the school community.
- **Leadership through Mentors:** Burns Middle School and Spring Lake Middle School have mentoring programs to further leadership capabilities.
  - **Teacher-to-Teacher Mentoring Program:** Burns Middle School has two varieties of teacher-to-teacher mentoring programs. The first partners experienced teachers with teachers who are either new to the profession or new to the school. The relationship allows new teachers to ask questions and prepare for the school year. The second program is a grade-level teaching team with a lead teacher. Members of a teaching team have the same planning period, allowing for productive discussion on issues of concern and enabling grade-level teachers to feel supported and stay on track.
  - **Teacher-to-Student Mentoring Relationships:** Spring Lake Middle School's teacher-to-student mentoring program groups teachers and students of the same gender together in meetings for the last thirty minutes of each school day. Students may discuss any topic with their group, including topics unrelated to school. Teachers facilitate communication about student problems and struggles and contact parents and other members of the school community when necessary. School staff view these relationships as excellent in preventing discipline problems, but caution that the effort put into establishing the mentoring relationship determines the program's success. Teachers use a

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

common book to guide lesson planning, but topics are set aside to address student needs whenever required.

### *STAFF DEVELOPMENT*

All schools in Project EASE had some form of staff development, but Glenwood Elementary School focused staff development on reducing discipline problems for an entire year.<sup>71</sup>

- **The Year-Long Staff Development:** Glenwood Elementary School focused staff development on reducing discipline problems for an entire year, beginning in the summer. The assistant principal researched possible root causes of issues the school experienced in the previous year, developed methods to address these root causes, and then presented the information to the staff in the summer for use during the school year. Trainings continued once a month throughout the school year, utilizing a variety of techniques including roleplaying, readings, and interactive activities. Beyond training for teachers, the assistant principal also introduced the topic to all students in an age-appropriate way, with a follow-up consisting of a story or activity during the second semester.

### *ALTERNATIVES-TO-SUSPENSION GRANT*

In the 2009-2010 school year, Minnesota Public Schools suspended 52,652 students for a total of 110,033 instructional days. Of all disciplinary actions taken by school administrators, out-of-school suspension was chosen 84 percent of the time. Most students were suspended for “disruptive/disorderly conduct/insubordination,”<sup>72</sup> and more than 2,500 suspensions were for attendance issues. **In an effort to reduce the number of suspensions, the Minnesota Department of Education awarded grant funds to five school districts to develop alternative-to-suspension programs**, along with interventions to reduce the need for suspension as a disciplinary action. The program recently released its second-year report, which detailed the five districts’ efforts with regard to “sustainable implementation strategies, common principles of effective practice and the development of a systematic data collection protocol.”<sup>73</sup>

### *EAGLE RIDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, BURNSVILLE-SAVAGE-EAGAN SCHOOL DISTRICT*

In the second year of the Alternatives-to-Suspension Grant, Eagle Ridge Junior High School reduced its number of out-of-school suspensions by 78 percent and its office discipline referrals by 55 percent. **Evening classes and Saturday school**, developed as alternative to

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Shevlin-Woodcock, Cindy. “Alternatives-to-Suspension Progress Report – Year 2.” Minnesota Department of Education.  
[https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:lsSof1jlltUJ:education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg%3FIdcService%3DGET\\_FILE%26dDocName%3D040309%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary+&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEsGb8Ayoa2wEzqnTsOahVYq4KkchPeCQS4Hvm7EhP30Do12TBdptF26HJ3RCR\\_Mu3EvjwCNNx1VusJk0nnFnVthZJ5M8NiaxAL9oKrUtXGWiFRemhUcyiUOIInU83bsAEKZzLtHqD&sig=AHIEtbRH Piu9rwbWnL9p4drQkypuyZKu-g](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:lsSof1jlltUJ:education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg%3FIdcService%3DGET_FILE%26dDocName%3D040309%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary+&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEsGb8Ayoa2wEzqnTsOahVYq4KkchPeCQS4Hvm7EhP30Do12TBdptF26HJ3RCR_Mu3EvjwCNNx1VusJk0nnFnVthZJ5M8NiaxAL9oKrUtXGWiFRemhUcyiUOIInU83bsAEKZzLtHqD&sig=AHIEtbRH Piu9rwbWnL9p4drQkypuyZKu-g)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

suspension programs, had 137 students participate. Additionally, 63 parents and 85 students attended culturally diverse after-school activities and neighborhood forums, established to **encourage parental engagement** with the school community. Despite progress, a disproportionate number of suspended students are students with disabilities and students of color, though the proportion is decreasing in comparison to white students and students without disabilities. In the third year of the grant, the school intends to continue evening classes and Saturday school and provide professional development for staff on culturally responsive instruction, along with improving the school climate and increasing parental involvement and student engagement.

*COLUMBIA ACADEMY (CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL), COLUMBIA HEIGHTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

In the second year of the Alternatives-to-Suspension grant, Columbia Academy saw a decrease in the number of out-of-school suspensions and loss of instructional days, but an increase in the total number of behavioral referrals. The school sought to devise targeted interventions for at-risk students and offered grant funds to provide professional development to staff in a variety of techniques related to interventions and alternatives to suspension, including restorative justice and peer mediation.<sup>74</sup>

Providing additional detail on one of the school's practices, the first-year report of the grant explained that the school had **developed an "alternative to suspension classroom" referred to as "Choices" for students needing intensive intervention**. A licensed special education teacher and a general education teacher lead the program, working "with students in a **restorative justice model** to hold them accountable for their actions while encouraging them to be involved in the culture of the school." Among their duties, the special education and general education teachers develop curricula for the students, conduct academic remediation, and devise service learning opportunities (as a restorative technique) for Choices students.<sup>75</sup>

With regard to future programming, the school has noted significant overrepresentation of African American students in percentages of students receiving behavioral referrals. In response, in the upcoming year the school plans to "develop cultural competence among staff, enhance the [use of] Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework and increase efficacy of universal prevention strategies and targeted interventions."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Shevlin-Woodcock, Cindy and Sarah Scullin Stokes. "Alternatives-to-Suspension Grant Project-Year 1 Case Study Report." Minnesota Department of Education. April 2011.  
[http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CEYQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Feducation.state.mn.us%2Fmdeprod%2Fidcplg%3FidcService%3DGET\\_FILE%26dDocName%3D004677%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary&ei=UmApUNysK4Hr6wHo8YHICg&usg=AFQjCNE\\_I64Sp8Kp\\_5gLO\\_AIZhyjPVUo9w](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CEYQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Feducation.state.mn.us%2Fmdeprod%2Fidcplg%3FidcService%3DGET_FILE%26dDocName%3D004677%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary&ei=UmApUNysK4Hr6wHo8YHICg&usg=AFQjCNE_I64Sp8Kp_5gLO_AIZhyjPVUo9w)

<sup>76</sup> Shevlin-Woodcock, Cindy. "Alternatives-to-Suspension Progress Report – Year 2." Op. cit.

*ALTERNATIVE LEARNING CENTERS, INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS 287 AND 916*

Four Alternative Learning Centers (ALCs) serve students at risk of not graduating from high school. Since joining Alternative-to-Suspension and beginning to track suspension data, the ALCs have “virtually eliminated” the suspension of students for insubordination and disruptive behavior.<sup>77</sup> The ALCs used the grant to implement a **Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Model** to decrease out-of-school suspensions. In describing the CPS Model, the source states “CPS teaches adults and youth that challenging behavior is a result of lagging skills and unsolved problems and that challenging behavior occur *when the demands of the environment exceed a person’s capacity to respond adaptively.*”<sup>78</sup> CPS uses three methods to solve problems.<sup>79</sup>

- Plan A: unilateral problem solving
- Plan B: identifying the unsolved problems that are precipitating the challenging episodes by expressing empathy and drilling down for information to develop an understanding of the person’s concern or perspective and by selecting high-priority issues to address together
- Plan C: dropping the problem completely

In the upcoming year, the ALCs plan to continue implementing the CPS model and support staff in further addressing students’ challenging behaviors, with the goal of further suspension reduction “for even the most egregious behaviors.”<sup>80</sup>

*PROCTOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS, PROCTOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

Proctor Secondary Schools also reports the benefits of tracking student disciplinary data, and was **able to reduce the number of students suspended, particularly special education students**, primarily through promoting awareness of the problem. With regard to programming, Proctor Secondary Schools used the Alternatives-to-Suspension grant to develop Respect and Peace in Schools (RAPS). While neither the grant document nor the Proctor website directly discusses what the RAPS program involves, the overall focus of Proctor’s alternatives to suspension efforts has been on **restorative approaches**. The first-year grant document highlighted the schools’ commitment to student development of “self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.” In supporting this development, the school created a plan “where students who would have been suspended instead developed and followed through with a restorative plan they selected from a menu of restorative measures.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted from source: Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Shevlin-Woodcock, Cindy and Sarah Scullin Stokes. Op. cit.

The second-year grant document highlighted successes of students participating in the RAPS program. In particular, student participants experienced the following improvements in behavior and academic performance:<sup>82</sup>

- 50 percent of the students improved their GPA
- 90 percent of the students decreased behavior incidents
- 80 percent of the students demonstrated improved mental health functioning
- 60 percent of the students decreased involvement in conflicts
- 90 percent of the students increased connection to community
- 0 percent of the students re-offended

*PARK HIGH SCHOOL, SOUTH WASHINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

The Alternatives-to-Suspension grant at Park High School has resulted in a significant decrease in office behavioral referrals and a decrease in suspensions in most categories, though suspensions for “miscellaneous offences” have substantially increased over the same period. The average length of time for out-of-school suspensions has also decreased.

With the Alternatives-to-Suspension grant Park High School has implemented the following research-based interventions: **Peer Counsel for Offense Resolution (PEER C.O.R.)**, a restorative justice process that involves the student offender, parents, community members, peers of the offender, and the victim; the **Social Skills and Aggression Replacement Training (START) program**, which helps students make better choices in conflict situations and develop stronger communication and problem-solving skills, and **Career Choices**, a guidance program for ninth graders. In the upcoming year, the school hopes to continue implementing suspension alternatives, reinforce a positive school community, and target intervention strategies at ninth graders in particular.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted from source: Shevlin-Woodcock, Cindy. “Alternatives-to-Suspension Progress Report – Year 2.” Op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. and Shevlin-Woodcock, Cindy and Sarah Scullin Stokes. Op. cit.

## APPENDIX: OTHER CLASSROOM AND IN-SCHOOL ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION

This section reproduces other suggestions for alternatives to suspensions, often applied at the school district level. Note that the lists are provided verbatim from each source.

### LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

#### Top Ten Alternatives to Suspension<sup>84</sup>

1. *Coordinated Behavior Plans for Any Student* – Creation of a structured, coordinated behavior plan specific to the student and based on the assessment of the quantity and purpose of the target behavior to be reduced; should focus on increasing desirable behavior and replacing inappropriate behavior.
2. *Alternative Programming* – Changes in the student’s schedule, classes or course content; assignment to an alternative school or program; independent study or work experience program. Should be tailored to the student’s needs.
3. *Behavior Monitoring* – Strategies to monitor behavior and academic progress might include cards checked after each class regarding behavior, self charting of behaviors, strategies to provide feedback to the student, etc.
4. *Appropriate In-School Alternatives* – In-school alternative in which academic tutoring, instruction related to the student’s behavior such as social skills, and a clearly defined procedure to return to class as soon as the student is ready is provided.
5. *Community Service* – Required amount of time in community service in school system or in the community.
6. *Counseling* – Students required to participate in counseling
7. *Parent Supervision in School* – Parents brainstorm with school; examples might be to “suspend” the parent to school – have the parent follow and supervise the student all day at school.
8. *Mini-Courses* – Short courses or modules on topics related to their behavior as a disciplinary consequence.
9. *Restitution* – Financial or “in kind.” Permits the student to restore or improve the school environment.
10. *Problem Solving/Contracting* – Use negotiation/problem solving approaches to assist student to identify alternatives. Develop a contract which includes reinforcers for success, and consequences for continuing problems.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted from source: “Top Ten Alternatives to Suspension.” Los Angeles Unified School District. [http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?\\_pageid=33,914384&\\_dad=ptl&\\_schema=PTL\\_EP](http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,914384&_dad=ptl&_schema=PTL_EP)

## THE ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

The Advancement Project lists the following 25 classroom and in-school alternatives to suspensions, expulsions, and arrests.<sup>85</sup>

- Reminder and/or redirection
- Re-teaching of expectations and skills
- Student/teacher conference
- Loss of privileges
- Role-play
- Written apology
- Mini-course/training on topics such as conflict resolution, anger management, social skills, or appropriate behavior
- Time-out/chill-out period
- Reflective essay or other reflective activity
- Independent study
- Parental outreach
- Student/teacher/parent conference
- Detention
- Referral to after-school program
- Saturday School
- Restorative practices, such as peace circles
- Referral to support staff, such as guidance counselor, social worker, or nurse
- Self-charting of behaviors
- Daily report card on behavior, task completion, and achievement
- Referral to an in-school suspension center or support center
- Restitution
- Community service
- Mentoring
- Modified/adjusted schedule, including changes to the student's overall schedule or course content
- Referral to community-based services

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<sup>85</sup>Quoted from source: "Alternatives to Suspension, Expulsion, and School-Based Arrest." Advancement Project. <http://www.stopschoolstojails.org/sites/default/files/alternative%20solutions%20pdf%20updated%206%2024%2009.pdf>

## UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

In identifying the following alternatives to suspension, the source states that all have “at least some research demonstrating positive behavioral-change outcomes for students, and is an opportunity to maintain or re-engage students in school rather than pushing them out of school.”<sup>86</sup> Suggestions are reproduced below:<sup>87</sup>

- **Problem solving/contracting.** Negotiation and problem-solving approaches can be used to assist students in identifying alternative behavior choices. The next step should involve developing a contract that reminds the student to engage in a problem-solving process, and which includes reinforcers for success and consequences for continuing problem behaviors.
- **Restitution.** In-kind restitution (rather than financial restitution, which often falls on the parents) permits the student to help to restore or improve the school environment either by directly addressing the problems caused by the student’s behavior (e.g., in cases of vandalism students can work to repair things they damaged), or by having the student improve the school environment more broadly (e.g., picking up trash, washing lockers).
- **Mini-courses or skill modules.** Short courses or self-study modules can be assigned as a disciplinary consequence. These should be on topics related to the student’s inappropriate behavior, and should be designed to teach the student to have increased awareness or knowledge about the topic, thus facilitating behavior change. These modules might include readings, videos, workbooks, tests, and oral reports on a range of topics such as alcohol/drug use or abuse, strategies for conflict resolution, anger control strategies, social skills (e.g., getting along with peers, making behavior appropriate for the setting), and appropriate communication skills (e.g., appropriate and inappropriate language, how to express disagreement).
- **Parent involvement/supervision.** Parents should be invited to brainstorm ways they can provide closer supervision or be more involved in their child’s schooling. Better communication and more frequent contacts between teachers and parents, as well as coordinated behavior-change approaches, are very useful and could be formalized into a disciplinary consequence.
- **Counseling.** Students may be required to receive additional supports or individual counseling from trained helping professionals (e.g., counselor, school psychologist) focused on problem solving or personal issues interfering with learning.
- **Community service.** Programs that permit the student to perform a required amount of time in supervised community service outside of school hours (e.g., volunteer at another school or an organization) should be created.

<sup>86</sup> Peterson, Op. cit.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted from source: Ibid.



- **Behavior monitoring.** Closely monitoring behavior and academic progress (e.g., self-charting of behaviors, feedback sessions for the student) will permit rewards to be provided for successful performance.
- **Coordinated behavior plans.** Creation of a structured, coordinated behavior support plan specific to the student and based on a hypothesis about the function of the target behavior to be reduced should be created. It should focus on increasing desirable behavior, and replacing inappropriate behaviors.
- **Alternative programming.** Provide short- or long-term changes in the student schedule, classes or course content or offer the option of participating in an independent study or work-experience program. Programming should be tailored to student needs, and permit appropriate credit accrual and progress toward graduation. Change of placement or programming must be made by the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team for students with EBD or other disabilities.
- **Appropriate in-school suspension.** In-school suspension should be provided and include academic tutoring, instruction on skill-building related to the student behavior problem (e.g., social skills), and a clearly defined procedure for returning to class contingent on student progress or behavior. The environment should be carefully managed to guard against using in-school suspension as a way to avoid attending classes.

Additionally, Peterson identifies the following programs which contribute to a positive school climate, thus reducing the number of behavior referrals and ultimately the number of suspensions.

- **Creating a caring school community and climate.** Programs that attend to patterns of good communication and problem solving, having clear patterns of authority and decision making, procedures for developing and implementing rules, helping students feel they belong and are welcome, good curriculum and instructional practices, and having a clean and positive physical environment.
- **Efforts to build adult-student relationships.** Programs offering opportunities for students to develop individual relationships with staff.
- **Increased parent involvement.** Programs that involve a variety of parents and community members in functions and activities within the school, and maintain communication about their children.
- **Character education/consistent school values.** School curriculum and organization features that promote the development of fundamental values in children. Typically these list desirable goals for student behavior.
- **Early identification and intervention.** Programs that permit systematic screening of students for potential behavior problems, and which provide interventions for the students identified as at “risk.”

- **Mediation programs.** Programs that teach students about non-violent conflict resolution and permit students to use and experience these in school. Peer-mediation is one example.
- **Bullying prevention and intervention.** Programs that teach students about bullying behaviors and how they can be reported to teachers. Specific interventions are created for both bullies and victims.
- **Conflict de-escalation training.** Programs that teach staff and students to recognize and to disengage from escalating conflict.
- **School-wide discipline program.** Programs that develop a common terminology and consistent approach to discipline across school staff. Responsibilities of students and staff are identified, consistency in rule enforcement is increased, and consequences are identified for positive and negative behaviors occurring anywhere in school.
- **Positive office referrals/recognition.** Programs that “catch students being good” and identify, reward, and celebrate individual students for appropriate behavior (e.g., attendance, being on-time, improving grades, meeting behavior goals).

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