

Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheet: Multi-Tiered System of Support to Reduce Out-of-School Suspensions

Out-of-school suspension has been linked to negative outcomes for students, schools and society (see Fact Sheet on Outcomes of Out-of-School Suspension). Suspension from school fails to address students' underlying needs and contributes to school failure (APA, 2008). In order to reduce the use of suspension, educators must implement evidence-based practices to actively teach and reinforce positive student behavior and to address the underlying reasons for misbehavior. The programs and practices must be tailored specifically to the needs of the school and in some instances the individual student.

Universal Practices (Tier I)

Universal level practices are school-wide and prevention-focused. The goal of these practices is to provide students with the skills and support they need to engage in positive behavior. Effective instruction, positive climate, and classroom management are key components. Two effective school-wide approaches are Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Both approaches incorporate strategies that emphasize the prevention of problem behaviors, the promotion of behavioral and social competence, and positive techniques over punitive measures (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). Specific critical features of universal practices are:

- Clear, positively stated expectations and are reviewed and reinforced often (Osher et al., 2010).
- Social emotional learning (SEL) focused on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Osher et al., 2010).
- Teaching, modeling, and reinforcing positive behavior (Osher et al., 2010).
- Policy that has disciplinary alternatives prior to and in place of suspension (APA, 2008).
- Culturally responsive instruction and classroom management (APA, 2008; Osher et al., 2010).
- Caring, respectful school community and climate (Osher et al., 2010).
- Positive staff-student and student-student relationships (Osher et al., 2010).
- Actively engage staff, students, parents/families and community partners (APA, 2008).
- Systems to screen and monitor behavior (Osher et al., 2010).

Targeted Practices (Tier II)

The goal of services at this level is screening and early identification of and intervention for students who need extra support. Students who receive these services have engaged in minor to moderate misbehavior or are at-risk of misbehavior (Anderson & Borgmeier, 2010). Repeated tardiness is a common minor misbehavior that may indicate risk. Supports must be appropriately aligned with the underlying cause of misbehavior. They may be provided in a small group setting. Monitoring at-risk students' academic and behavioral progress is crucial in order to identify warning signs of problems and adjust services accordingly. Services often focus on specific skill instruction, practice, and feedback. Other practices may include:

- Ensuring that the student's basic needs are being met (adequate food, exercise, sleep).
- Select targeted, evidence-based instruction to build social, coping, and/or academic skills (Anderson & Borgmeier, 2010).
- Academic and behavior progress monitoring with frequent feedback (Anderson & Borgmeier, 2010).
- Restorative practices and mediation programs (APA, 2008).
- Reconnecting students positively with staff, students, and school activities (APA, 2008).
- Staff or student mentoring.
- Behavior contracts that reinforce positive behavior.
- Opportunities to practice positive behavior in new situations (Anderson & Borgmeier, 2010).

Intensive Practices (Tier III)

Intensive practices target students who have the greatest need or who engage in the most severe misbehavior. The goals are to 1) use alternatives to suspension to address skill deficits through teaching and reinforcing of positive behavior and 2) address students' unmet needs with wraparound services. Key practices include:

- Implementation of assessment-based interventions (Anderson & Borgmeier, 2010).
- Collaboration with parents, law enforcement, juvenile justice and mental health professionals to develop an array of alternatives-to-suspension options (APA, 2008).
- Integrated wraparound services that may include mental health support, counseling, mentoring, tutoring and social work services (APA, 2008).
- Making adjustments to the environment, teaching replacement skills and building competencies.
- Restitution/restorative measures (APA, 2008).
- Mediation programs.
- Consultation with student support services specialists to evaluate the function of the misbehavior and teach acceptable alternative behaviors (Anderson & Borgmeier, 2010).
- In-school suspension, evening school or Saturday school as time to implement these practices (additional time in school must include instruction, intervention, or these practices to be effective; APA, 2008).
- Development of a crisis management plan.

Understanding Misbehavior

Misbehavior is an indicator of need. Students who are suspended from school are often the students who need school the most. By creating multi-tiered behavior support systems that teach and reinforce positive behavior, educators can reduce out-of-school suspensions and enhance student and school success.

Using Data to Prevent and Decrease Behavior Problems in Your School

Making data-based decisions is crucial in developing practices that meet the needs of your school. Most schools already have systems for collecting behavior incident data in place.

1. Evaluate your data collection system; is all of the important information recorded?
2. Important information for behavior incidents is:
 - What: Type of incident.
 - When: Date, time of day.
 - Where: Location.
 - Who: Student(s) involved.
 - Why: What was the purpose of the misbehavior?
3. Use this data to identify “hot spots” of inappropriate behavior.
4. Make changes to “hot spots” and monitor data to evaluate the effectiveness of the change.

Example: Data shows that fighting most often occurs among a group of five students in the ninth grade locker bank during transition times. Students report that fighting stems from overcrowding as students rush to make class on time.

Potential solutions: Review behavior expectations in the locker bank with all students, teach the five students social skills or replacement behaviors for fighting, increase transition time, spread out lockers, increase supervision in locker bank or reinforce students who are following rules.

Resources

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning: <http://casel.org>

What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>

National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support: <http://www.pbis.org>

Minnesota PBIS Resources: www.pbismn.org

References

- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>
- Anderson, C. M., & Borgmeier, C., (2010). Tier II interventions within the framework of school-wide positive behavior support: Essential features for design, implementation, and maintenance. *Behavior Analysis in Practice* 3(1): 33-45. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3004682>
- Osher, D., Bear, G.G., Sprague, J.R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 48-58. <http://edr.sagepub.com/content/39/1/48.abstract>

For more information, [see the Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheets on the Minnesota Department of Education website](#) or contact Eric Kloos at (651) 582-8268 or eric.kloos@state.mn.us.