Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheet: Multi-Tiered Behavior Support Systems that Reduce Out-of-School Suspensions

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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 concerns and contributes to school failure (APA, 2006). In order to reduce the use of suspension, educators must develop 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.

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.

Universal Practices (Tier I)

Universal level practices are school-wide and prevention-oriented. The goal of these practices is to provide all students with the skills and support they need to engage in positive behavior. Effective instruction and classroom management are key components. Two effective school-wide approaches are Positive Behavior Intervention Support (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:

- School-wide positive behavior support program.
- Clear expectations that are taught and reviewed often.
- Reinforcement/acknowledgement of positive behavior.
- Policy that has disciplinary alternatives prior to and in place of suspension (APA, 2006).
- Teacher training in classroom management and cultural responsiveness.
- Caring school community and climate.
- Positive staff-student and student-student relationships.
- Parent and community involvement.
- Teaching of social skills.
- Systematic screening of behavior.

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. Minor misbehavior such as repeated tardies may be an indicator of risk. Specific services must be tailored to each student's needs. Monitoring at-risk students'

academic and behavioral progress is crucial in order to identify warning signs of problems and adjust services accordingly. Other practices may include:

- School-wide positive behavior support program.
- Anger management or social skills instruction and practice.
- Mini-courses or skill units addressing skill deficits.
- Reconnecting students positively with the school and staff.
- Engaging students in extracurricular activities.
- Mentoring.
- Behavior contracts that reinforce positive behavior.
- Make sure the student's basic needs are being met (adequate food, exercise, sleep).

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) to address students' unmet needs with wraparound services. Key practices include:

- Collaboration with parents, law enforcement, juvenile justice and mental health professionals to develop an array of alternatives-to-suspension options (APA, 2006).
- Systems of integrated wraparound services that may include mental health support, counseling, mentoring, tutoring and social work services.
- Restitution/restorative measures.
- Mediation programs.
- Conflict de-escalation training.
- In-school suspension, evening school or Saturday school.
- Consultation with student support services specialists to evaluate the function of the misbehavior and teach student acceptable alternative behaviors.

Understanding Misbehavior

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.

Online Resources

Best Evidence Encyclopedia
http://www.bestevidence.org/
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
http://casel.org/
Intervention Central
http://interventioncentral.com/
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 (2006). *Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools?* Washington, DC: American Affective Association.
www.apa.org/ed/cpse/zufreport.pdf

Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How Can We Improve School Discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39, 48–58.

Further Reading from the Minnesota Department of Education:

Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheets:
- Outcomes of Out-of-School Suspensions
- Effective Classroom Practices

Dangerous Weapons and Disciplinary Incidents Reports

SNAPSHOTS of Minnesota Youth