

Supportive School Discipline:

A Snapshot from
Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiatives



SAMHSA-funded National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention
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Introduction

In the early 1990s, many schools adopted zero tolerance policies, which mandate the use of specific disciplinary consequences—often severe and punitive—in an effort to increase school safety. Originally designed to reduce weapon-carrying in schools, these policies have been expanded in many school districts to include bullying, fighting, the use of alcohol and other drugs, swearing, and inappropriate dress, leading to significant increases in student suspensions and expulsions. However, recent research is questioning the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies in increasing school safety, and identifies many negative consequences of zero tolerance for students, including school disengagement, failure, and dropout.^{1,2}

A recent study conducted by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, involving almost a million public secondary school students in Texas, found that nearly 60 percent of students were suspended or expelled at least once between grades 7 and 12. Only 3 percent of these suspensions and expulsions were mandatory responses to students' possession of drugs or weapons on campus; 97 percent were at school administrators' discretion.³ The study also reported that African American students were 31 percent more likely to be disciplined than their white and Hispanic peers and that nearly three-quarters of the students who qualified for special education services were suspended or expelled at least once.

In another recent report, the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights reported that African American students are more than three and a half times as likely to be suspended or expelled than their white peers.⁴ Students with disabilities, including mental health or behavioral problems, are more than twice as likely to experience one or more out-of-school suspensions.

Taken together, these studies illustrate the short- and long-term costs of schools' increased reliance on suspension and expulsion, including rising rates of academic failure and dropout, escalating behavioral problems, and increased risk of violence and substance abuse.

One of the most disturbing consequences of the dramatic rise in suspensions and expulsions is often referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline," in which schools use harsh disciplinary practices, such as suspending or expelling students for minor infractions and/or moving students to inferior alternative schools, resulting in more students dropping out of school and eventually being funneled into the juvenile justice system and, for many, into adult prisons.⁵ In the Texas study, half of all students with 11 or more suspensions or expulsions were also involved in the juvenile justice system, and only 40 percent of those students graduated from high school.⁶



Supportive School Discipline and Safe Schools/Healthy Students

At the end of the day, no single system—not law enforcement, the courts, health services, departments of children and families, schools, or others—is exclusively responsible for the students who are repeatedly suspended or expelled. Instead, all of these systems have a role to play in supporting these students, their families, teachers, and the communities where they live.⁷

Supportive school discipline is a systemic constellation of programs and practices that promote positive behaviors while preventing negative or risky behaviors. It is positive rather than punitive, and aims to create a safe learning environment that enhances *all* students' outcomes. A number of approaches to supportive school discipline have been shown to increase school safety without increasing suspensions and expulsions. One such initiative is Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS), a cross-agency collaboration among the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Launched in 1999 in response to a national increase in school shootings, SS/HS addresses the underlying factors that contribute to school violence, students' substance abuse and mental health problems, school failure, dropout, and suspension and expulsion. Providing support to school-community collaborations that implement evidence-based programs, SS/HS has reached millions of students and thousands of schools in more than 365 communities in 49 states.

Many SS/HS Initiatives have achieved significant results by employing supportive school discipline practices. Consider, for example, the Austin, Texas, SS/HS Initiative and a four-year-old boy named Enrique*:

* All names have been changed.

At the age of four, Enrique had already been expelled from several schools. He had attended a local Head Start campus for a few short weeks, but his behavior was so abysmal, his mother, Ana, was told that he could not return. She heard about the Lucy Reed School in Austin, Texas, a preschool serving 500 at-risk four year olds from disadvantaged communities, and using a supportive school discipline approach with its students. Ana asked for the school's help.

On Enrique's first day at Lucy Reed, he tore the classroom apart. Desks were tipped over and chairs flew. The children were terrified. The situation was so out of hand, the students and staff evacuated the building. On his second day of school, Enrique was only permitted to stay for a few minutes.

The highly skilled staff at Lucy Reed had been trained, with SS/HS funding, to implement Incredible Years and PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System), two evidence-based programs that train providers, parents, and children to reduce negative behaviors, improve social and emotional skills, and create a positive environment for learning and growth.

Lucy Reed staff began working with Ana to provide her with parenting skills. At the same time, they gradually increased the school day for Enrique, providing him with one-on-one play therapy and helping him understand what positive behavior was expected of him. Within weeks, Enrique was able to complete a school day and began to attend Lucy Reed daily. Ana was able to hold down a job for the first time, and she and her son enjoyed peace at home. Speaking of Enrique's transformation, Ana says, "This changed my life—it changed our lives."



Supportive School Discipline in SS/HS Communities

SS/HS Initiatives from across the nation have found four components to be key in creating and sustaining a system of positive discipline and, ultimately, a safe and supportive school environment:

1. Cross-agency partnerships
2. Data-driven decisions
3. System-wide use of evidence-based programs and practices
4. Parents and families engaged as partners

SS/HS grantees employ all four key components to create positive, supportive learning environments as part of their initiatives. Each key component is described in more detail below.

1. Cross-Agency Partnerships

To engender a holistic approach, SS/HS requires collaborative partnerships among school districts, law enforcement and juvenile justice systems, mental health providers, and other relevant stakeholders. The goal of these partnerships is to implement effective solutions that improve outcomes for youth at risk for suspension and expulsion and that promote success for *all* students. Partners meet regularly to identify needs, share information, collect data, pool resources, and provide necessary services as early as possible in cooperative, non-duplicative ways. They may also collaborate to provide ongoing comprehensive staff development to support schools' effective implementation of evidence-based programs and practices.

Below are examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this key component:

- » In the **Union Springs (New York) Central School District**, the SS/HS partnership—comprising directors of education, human services, and law enforcement agencies—focused on early intervention with and treatment of at-risk youth. The partners created a multidisciplinary screening and assessment system for youth at risk for a host of issues, including arrest, truancy, substance abuse, violence, suspension, and expulsion. The system has been institutionalized in the community so that the partners can now identify at-risk youth early in the development of problems, and provide qualified professionals with a thorough assessment of youth assets and risks. The school district uses its data aggregation system to help the partnership plan services,

which helps the families who consent to share students' school, juvenile justice, and other confidential records. This agreement to share data allows partners to employ a three-pronged approach: (1) assessing at-risk students, (2) providing services and treatment to students in need, and (3) coordinating services and discharge planning.

- » The **Santa Fe (New Mexico) Public Schools** SS/HS Initiative found that its involvement with Santa Fe Regional Juvenile Justice and its SS/HS partners—the police department, local mental health agencies, the Juvenile Probation/Parole Office, and the Children, Youth, and Families Department—had the most significant impact on discipline. Together the partners reviewed a body of cases involving students who had at least two juvenile arrests and a history of runaway. Working together on a weekly basis with a case manager, partners combined their resources to support the identified students. In the process, which included site visits to the Detention Center and runaway youth shelters, they learned how each of the different systems worked, how their vocabulary was different, and how to work together for *prevention* rather than *punishment*.

When the Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline report⁸ came out, the partners studied it as a group and recognized that their community was not adequately addressing students' needs. The partners worked together to map all of the services and supports available to youth, based on the risk factors identified for the Santa Fe community. Next, they developed a strengths-based systems integration plan to provide resources and supports, filling the gaps to adequately address risks. Their ability to work together as a team, along with other interventions and staff training, has contributed to positive outcomes—an 11 percent reduction in adolescent arrests, reduced suspensions and expulsions, and reduced police calls to school sites—and has resulted in a mechanism for sustainability of this process beyond the life of the SS/HS grant.

2. Data-Driven Decisions

SS/HS sites use logic models that help site staff structure their actions, promote accountability, and monitor progress. The sites regularly collect data about the effectiveness of evidence-based program implementation and indicators of student success, so that they may make timely decisions that improve student outcomes. They also regularly collect and track data about at-risk youth to identify and address students' needs in a timely manner and to prevent suspension and expulsion. They use data to better understand the consistency and effectiveness of suspension and expulsion policies and practices. In addition, they share relevant student data with community partners to provide appropriate services. For example, with the family's consent, they would share a student's mental health assessment with juvenile justice staff.

Below are some examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this key component.

Identifying High-Risk Students in Order to Provide Needed Supports

- » The **Lamont (California) School District** uses the AERIES Data System to identify high-risk students. The district has identified several red-flag behavioral infractions and socialization issues, such as bullying. When a student is identified as "high risk" through the data system, California state education codes—attendance, behavior, and academics—indicate what supports

the student needs. Principals, vice principals, counselors, probation officers, and attendance advocates can access the system and act on the codes. When a student is suspended, he or she is referred to a mental health provider, and the student's family can receive support from a Family Resource Center.⁹

Using a Comprehensive Database to Reduce Behavioral Problems and Improve Student Outcomes

» The **Pueblo City (Colorado) School District** SS/HS Initiative implemented PBIS—a system-wide approach (rather than a curriculum or program) to improving problem behaviors—to improve its school climate and to reduce suspensions and expulsions. PBIS emphasizes the prevention of problem behaviors in classrooms and across the school, active teaching about positive behaviors, predictable and consistent consequences for problem behaviors, procedures to assess behaviors, and the ongoing use of data to make decisions.

The PBIS Specialist recognized that the district's student database did not provide adequate behavioral data for the district's needs. The PBIS Specialist worked with district data staff to add fields and categories, creating a more comprehensive data collection system to better track students' behavior. The PBIS Specialist also added an interactive software program, Tableau, to visually map, aggregate, and cross-examine discipline behavioral data with other school data to identify patterns and trends. Using Tableau, the PBIS Specialist can examine underlying data for any location, day, or student. If there is a blip on the chart, clicking on that blip will help find the underlying causes. For example, if there is a surge in suspended students at a certain time, the underlying data can be examined to determine whether several students were involved in the same incident (e.g., a school fight). This helps the district distinguish between an anomaly and a trend.

Data are updated daily, and the integrated database system is used in a variety of ways to track practices and improve discipline outcomes:

- Staff map the time of day, location on school property, and day of the week when most discipline issues are happening in an individual school or across the district. The initiative can then, for example, share data with the School Resource Officers (SROs) at roll call to distribute SROs to the "hot spots" of the school at the appropriate times of day.
- Data are shared with school principals in PBIS teams and leadership teams. In one school, staff responded to the data showing an increase in problem behaviors in the lunchroom by changing the number of lunch periods offered, thereby reducing the number of students in the lunchroom at the same time. As a result, discipline referrals decreased dramatically.
- The data system allows the district to identify how students who participate in Exceptional Student Services (i.e., assistance with emotional, intellectual, academic, or physical needs) or are from different ethnic groups are affected by disciplinary practices, in order to determine any disparities in enforcement. So far the district has found no significant disparities among student groups, although it has noted differences between schools.
- District staff track data across programs and services to capture trends over several years and to identify the collective impact. They then use these data to make decisions on where to allocate resources within the tiered intervention pyramid.

The Pueblo City Schools SS/HS Initiative has also used the database to determine the effectiveness of PBIS. For example, in the 25 schools implementing PBIS at 80 percent fidelity, office referrals decreased by almost 38 percent. In contrast, schools that were not implementing PBIS with high fidelity had office referrals at the same or greater rates than before program implementation. Staff can then translate the cost of office referrals into loss of student classroom time. For example, the average office referral results in approximately 30–45 minutes of student time out of class. By reducing office referrals by 38 percent, the SS/HS Initiative can calculate and communicate to other staff how many extra minutes of student classroom time are gained by effective implementation of PBIS.

Using Data to Provide Appropriate Services to Students

» The **Austin (Texas) Independent School District** SS/HS Initiative created an online database called Youth Service Mapping (YSM), which allows agencies to search for regional service providers, such as mental health or law enforcement; physically map the providers; and analyze the service gaps by region and needs. Providers across the region can use YSM to assess the available services for students and families and make referrals as needed. YSM also allows the SS/HS project's core management team to track the services delivered by each provider. Currently, detailed information on 100 agencies, 11 coalitions, and 10 funders is available, and the Texas government is interested in expanding YSM to include all of Central Texas.

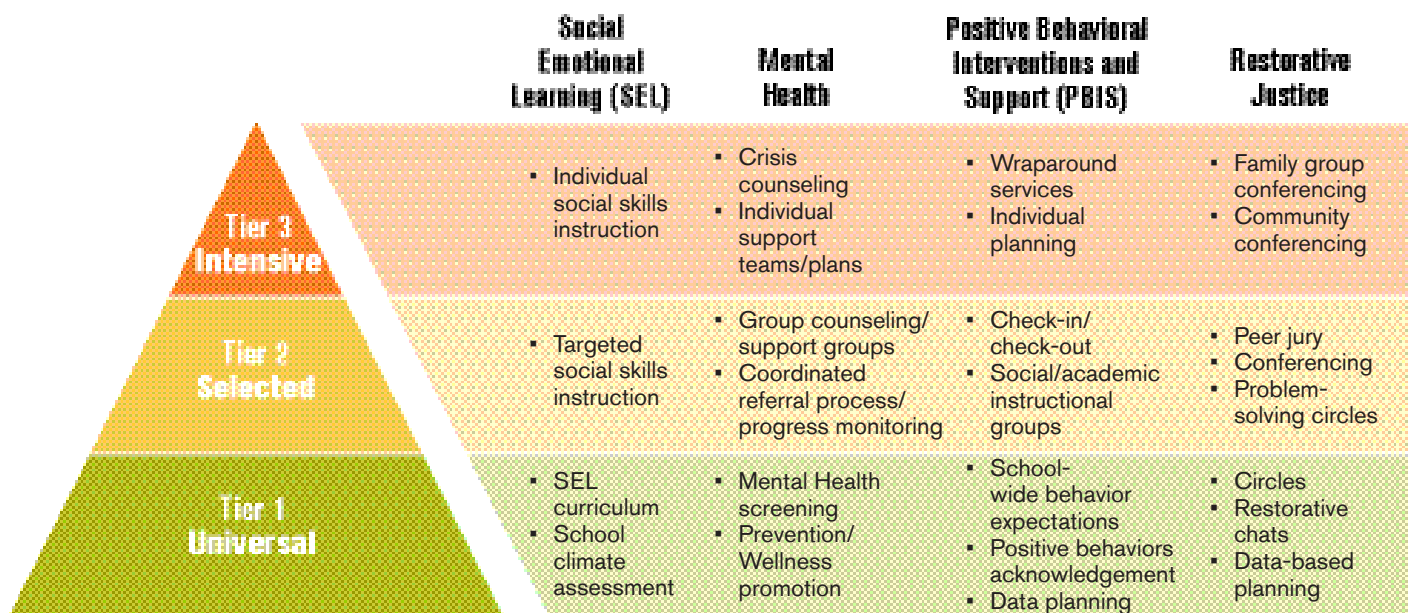
In addition, the Austin Independent School District superintendent recently approved a project that builds on SS/HS's work by developing an advanced case management system. The system includes predictive analytics so that the 17,000 students who have two or more at-risk indicators can be served and tracked more effectively. SS/HS staff will take the lead on training and systems development to assist campuses in effectively monitoring these high-need students.

3. System-wide Use of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices

Schools can decrease the use of punitive disciplinary measures by implementing evidence-based programs and practices (EBPs) that address the specific behaviors that precede and/or contribute to suspensions and expulsions, such as truancy, substance abuse, bullying, lack of social and emotional skills, and violence. SS/HS sites employ a systemic approach to creating a culture of positive behavior by implementing culturally appropriate EBPs to address a continuum of students' needs at all grade levels and within all three tiers of the intervention pyramid (see Figure 1).

Tier 1 of the intervention pyramid includes universal programs for all students, such as teaching social and emotional skills to young children. Tier 2 comprises selected individual or group interventions for students who are at risk. Tier 3 includes intensive, targeted interventions for high-risk students (e.g., mental health crisis counseling) and positive alternative programs (e.g., mental health support) that keep suspended and expelled students engaged and learning.

Figure 1: Pyramid of Interventions



Adapted from Illinois SS/HS State Group

Below are some examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this key component:

» The **Tigard-Tualatin (Oregon) School District** has decreased suspensions and expulsions by using a systemic, multipronged approach that addresses the three tiers of intervention. Tigard-Tualatin employs the preventative PBIS approach at the universal level to improve the school climate for all students. The district also has PBIS Teams—Yellow Zone Teams for second-tier selected academic and behavior intervention planning and monitoring, and Red Zone Teams for intensive, targeted third-tier support. Red Zone Teams at each school include the principal or associate principal, school counselors, learning specialists, SS/HS mental health care coordinators, SROs, and the SS/HS juvenile counselor. This team works to implement interventions—based on data collection about absences, office disciplinary referrals, and suspensions—for students reaching identified thresholds in these areas.

The Check In/Check Out program has been implemented as a second-tier intervention for the improvement of school attendance and school engagement for selected middle school students with attendance or early behavior problems. Key features of this program are frequent feedback to students about their behavior, in order to prevent future problem behavior; positive reinforcement to students for meeting daily goals; data tracking of positive behavior in addition to disciplinary issues; and the acknowledgement of expected behavior through a reward system. There is solid evidence that this approach is working. For example, in 2010–2011, there was a 34 percent decrease in office disciplinary referrals and a 54 percent decrease in suspensions among students participating in Check In/Check Out.

- » The **Albemarle County (Virginia) Public Schools** SS/HS Initiative employs a variety of EBPs at all school levels:

Level	EBPs
PreK	The HighScope preschool curriculum promotes development of pro-social behaviors and skills, focusing on key areas of social learning that build children’s competence and self-awareness and help them to begin to understand how to regulate their behavior and responses.
Elementary School	The Responsive Classroom program focuses on students’ social-emotional learning, recognizing that children’s development of social skills and maturation in the classroom is as important as their development of academic skills, and that discipline is learned behavior that needs to be taught in the classroom.
Middle and High School	Restorative Practices are integrated into middle and high school classrooms. This program uses carefully orchestrated circles, conversations, and conferences to give students the opportunity to learn the effects of their actions. These practices contribute to students’ social and emotional development by teaching them valuable skills in building and repairing relationships with their classmates, teachers, family, and community. Restorative Practices keep students in school, learning, rather than removing them for suspension or expulsion, and provides a process for inviting those students who are sent to an alternative school back into their home school in a way that strengthens both them <i>and</i> the community. Mental health counselors in the middle and high schools work with students who have been disciplined for classroom behavior and students who report difficulty with peers or teachers. These counselors have been trained to use Motivational Interviewing, a counseling method that focuses on using positive reinforcement and students’ self-motivation to change problem behavior.
Alternative Education Sites	Mental health therapists funded by SS/HS are available on-site. These sites also use Restorative Practices, which have been incorporated into the students’ re-entry process when they return to their home school. This gives re-entering students the opportunity to address any harm they may have caused others and to restore teacher-student, student-administration, and student-student relationships.

These school-wide positive discipline practices are beginning to show results, including a 23 percent decline in physical fights on school property and a 15 percent decrease in school discipline offenses for students in grades 6–12 since the SS/HS implementation began.

- » The goal of the **Chicago (Illinois) Public Schools, District #299**, SS/HS Initiative was to strengthen and expand on a continuum of services for all students, resulting in positive student outcomes. Recognizing the Illinois Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) standards as benchmarks for positive behavioral and mental health, the Chicago SS/HS Partnership developed the capacity to provide targeted SEL supports to the district’s student population. Using district- and school-level data, Chicago’s SS/HS Partnership identified evidenced-based interventions and practices to address students’ SEL needs, as well as mental health services and supports at each tier in the

pyramid model for select schools in the South Shore. These prevention and targeted behavioral supports and strategies integrated positive discipline practices and provided school-based services that helped students meet district and state SEL standards.

Implementing programming to support students at all levels of the pyramid required a number of key infrastructural supports:

- Comprehensive professional development, including training and coaching to support the staff implementing the programs
- A screening and referral process that teachers and administrators understood and could readily use to identify student needs and refer them to the appropriate services
- Coordination among departments and school programs and services
- A data system to track behaviors and services (e.g., the School-Wide Information System), monitor the referral process and program implementation, and collect outcome data (e.g., discipline referrals, school attendance)

With the development of a supportive infrastructure, the ability to deliver EBPs increased significantly. Positive outcomes included an increase in average daily attendance, an increase in the number of students who received appropriate referrals for services, and a majority (84 percent) of SS/HS students in grades 6–12 stating that they perceived positive adult support in school.

Districts Focus Resources on Early Prevention EBPs

Many SS/HS sites have recognized the importance of focusing resources on prevention, such as teaching social and emotional skills to young children, to prevent problems that interfere with their later academic success and to improve children's long-term outcomes. Here is an example of an SS/HS site that successfully implemented this strategy:

- » **Adams County (Colorado) Youth Initiative**, the SS/HS Initiative in the Adams 12 Five Star Schools, currently has the greatest success rate for implementing the early childhood EBP Incredible Years Dinosaur School (IY) in the state of Colorado—delivering the program to nearly 100 percent of the children attending the school district and Head Start preschool, and an estimated 50 percent of all four year olds in the county. IY is a highly effective program that has been proven, through years of rigorous research, to improve the mental, social, and emotional health of children ages 3–6. IY works with children, their parents, and their teachers to help them develop the skills necessary for children to arrive at school emotionally and socially ready to learn, and to succeed once they are there. IY boosts academic success, is culturally sensitive, and produces significant reductions in conduct problems and significant increases in social skills.

The outcomes for children in this program continue to be phenomenal, with huge gains in the amount of positive change every year. Positive outcomes include significant increases in children's pro-social and communication skills, emotional regulation skills, academic skills, and overall social competence. The program has had an even greater impact on children who began the year with lower scores, demonstrating that the program is especially beneficial for children at highest risk for school failure.

SS/HS Sites Provide Mental Health Support for At-Risk Students

Within the pyramid model's top tier, SS/HS school districts and community partners provide mental health support, such as assessment and treatment, for at-risk students. This is part of the constellation of programs and practices necessary to meet all students' needs and to reduce the need for suspensions and expulsions because of students' disruptive behaviors. Below are two examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this strategy:

- » **Alhambra (California) Unified School District**, a very diverse and predominantly immigrant community in greater Los Angeles, developed the SS/HS Initiative Gateway to Success—a school-based model designed to enhance student success by reducing barriers, which includes addressing students' mental health needs. Every student who is recommended for expulsion is automatically referred to Gateway. The program requires schools and mental health providers to collaborate on: prevention, diagnosis, and treatment services for students and families; crisis intervention services; training of school personnel and mental health professionals; technical assistance; linguistically appropriate and culturally competent services; and evaluation of program effectiveness. Gateway's efforts to intervene earlier, engage students, and keep them on track have resulted in a 50 percent decrease in truancy over a two-year period and a dramatic decrease in expulsions.
- » **Paradise (California) Unified School District** implements a variety of positive discipline practices, including PBIS and Restorative Practices. As part of the pyramid's top tier of interventions, the district provides mental health services for students with challenging behaviors. Grant-funded counselors, school-based counselors from a local provider, and county mental health therapists work together on school sites to address student behaviors through a Student Assistant Program team referral system appropriate to each site. Often the team "wraps around" services for high-need families. The partners' coordinating team meets monthly to identify gaps and resolve problems. Partners offer trainings within their own agencies that relate to positive student behaviors, with a portion of trainings offered to all partners. Having counseling services available on-site has worked well, resulting in both positive responses from families and students and decreases in recidivism.

Districts Provide Positive Alternative Programs for Suspended or Expelled Students

Schools have long relied on exclusionary discipline practices to deal with inappropriate behaviors. Changing the culture to accept inclusive practices is a huge and ongoing challenge despite the fact that research shows the ineffectiveness and negative impact of exclusionary practices. Changing culture is hard.

—Paula Van Every, Project Director, SS/HS Initiative, Jackson, Mississippi

As another kind of top-tier intervention, SS/HS districts ensure that suspended or expelled students continue to receive an education by providing alternative programs that contribute to positive student outcomes. Below are two examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this strategy:

- » The **Campbell County (Wyoming) School District** SS/HS Initiative worked with the district's Specialized Treatment and Rehabilitation (S.T.A.R.) Program to reshape the program's philosophy from a punitive "boot camp" approach to a more holistic, wellness-based approach. The S.T.A.R. program is a voluntary alternative to student expulsion, focusing on positive behavior education, individual mental health or substance abuse counseling, drug screening, community service, and physical conditioning. The majority of students who participate in S.T.A.R. have committed violent or drug-related offenses on school property, and would have otherwise been expelled from school for one year. During the 2010–2011 school year, 57 students were referred to S.T.A.R., of whom 44 were facing suspension or expulsion from school. Thirty-four of the 44 students facing suspension or expulsion successfully completed the program and were able to remain in school rather than be expelled. The average GPA upon entering the S.T.A.R. program during the 2010–2011 school year was 2.07, and the average GPA upon completion was 2.39.
- » The **Albuquerque (New Mexico) Public Schools** SS/HS Initiative created a Juvenile Justice Action Team to develop a strategic plan for enhancing inter-agency collaboration to stem the flow of students from schools to juvenile detention. The strategic plan comprised numerous action steps, for example:
- Defining challenging disruptive behavior on school grounds
 - Identifying the nature of referrals from schools to juvenile detention or probation
 - Reviewing suspension, Special Education, and administrative policies
 - Determining how to handle minor infractions within the school community rather than via a police report
 - Mapping gaps in existing services
 - Designing and implementing the pilot project Prevention Intervention Program for Youth (PIPY), aimed at providing prevention and early intervention services to young people who are at risk of entering the juvenile justice system

The PIPY pilot project has been implemented at one of the largest middle schools in the district, which has a high number of referrals to juvenile detention. The program's components include (1) two caseworkers hired to assist youth transitioning back to school and to assist parents and guardians in navigating the system and finding appropriate behavioral services in the community, (2) wrap-around services for youth not currently receiving assistance, (3) increased communication, services, and support for youth released from detention, and (4) improved tracking of students and communication among the school district, the Juvenile Detention Center, Probation and Parole, and the Courts. In addition, a school-based team comprising staff from juvenile probation, juvenile detention, school administration, SROs, counselors, and social workers meets monthly.

Bookings for delinquent acts occurring on PIPY pilot school grounds have decreased 53 percent. The school administration also reports that the number of repeat offenders has gone down from previous years—a change that they attribute to on-site caseworkers preventing violence through conflict resolution and immediate referral to prevention programs.

Districts Provide Comprehensive Staff Development to Support Effective EBP Implementation

New programs require staff to develop new skills and knowledge. Staff also need ongoing support to effectively implement and monitor implementation progress. Successful SS/HS sites provide extensive staff development to support EBPs. Below are two examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this strategy:

- » The **Escondido (California) Union School District** SS/HS Initiative, CARE Youth Project (CYP), is a comprehensive approach that includes Early Childhood readiness training for providers, integrates the PBIS preventative school-wide and classroom system of supports, provides an anti-aggression/pro-social skills program for selected middle school students, and implements ATOD and bullying prevention programs. Comprehensive Student Assistance Teams (CSAT)—multidisciplinary teams of professionals—identify at-risk and high-risk students in need of behavioral, social, and emotional supports, and create intervention plans that link students to relevant group, individualized, and intensive selected and targeted interventions (e.g., counseling, mentoring, anger management, mental health services, and case management). Each CYP program is supported by intensive trainings:
- Site administrators learn about positive disciplinary practices.
 - School site-based teams are trained in implementing the PBIS school-wide framework.
 - Site Support Specialists provide ongoing training to school site staff on barriers to student learning.
 - Social workers, counselors, and agency staff receive training for the Aggression Replacement Training/Pro-Social Skills EBP.
 - Attendance Intervention Specialists provide ongoing training to support staff, including clerical staff and administrators, on attendance policy and the CSAT process that links students with supportive interventions.
 - The Behavioral Specialist offers classroom management trainings to teachers and other instructional assistants.

Although CYP found it challenging to create and implement so many additional systems, the efforts have resulted in increased school attendance, reduced office referrals, and reduced suspensions and expulsions (e.g., a 35 percent decrease in violence-related suspensions, a 60 percent decrease in expulsions in CYP middle schools).

- » The **Eudora (Kansas) Public Schools** SS/HS Initiative has been implementing PBIS school-wide. As PBIS is an EBP that requires extensive training and support, the school district has established first-tier universal systems by training and staffing coaches and PBIS teams. The district has provided staff with various levels of training, including team training for each of their buildings at least twice each year. Coaches meet monthly with the PBIS coordinator for additional staff development and problem-solving and to promote district-wide consistency. Most schools devote time to PBIS during their monthly staff in-service day. A district leadership team meets quarterly to monitor implementation and address district-wide needs. Social marketing to all staff is also part of the staff development mix, as well as annual presentations of SS/HS data.

Additional training is required to ensure that PBIS is implemented with fidelity and that decisions are driven by the data. To meet these needs, a small group of staff have been trained and certified

in the School-Wide Information System—a behavior collection system used in conjunction with PBIS—as well as the School Evaluation Tool, which evaluates the integrity of universal-level implementation of PBIS, and the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool, which checks the fidelity of practices.

Monitoring implementation fidelity and effectiveness helps the district identify ongoing needs for staff development, for example:

- Staff development for principals to help them understand the need to link students to mental health assessment, services, and/or skill-building when behavioral issues are severe or chronic.
- Training to help staff use additional data sources—such as the Communities That Care survey and the School Climate Survey—to target individual school issues and update PBIS matrices. For example, bullying is an issue that often surfaces in these two surveys but not as much in the behavior incident report data. Since bullying is often hidden from adults, factoring in a variety of data sources is necessary, both to identify the scope of the problem and to create a safe school.

4. Parents and Families Engaged as Partners

Family involvement in children’s academic and behavioral performance, both in school and at home, is crucial to the success of EBPs related to academic and behavioral health. Studies have shown that parenting programs improve children’s lives—by reducing children’s aggressive, disruptive, or antisocial behavior; improving parent-child interactions; reducing substance abuse among children; and improving children’s academic success.¹⁰

SS/HS sites have used a variety of culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies to engage families as partners in supporting students and enhancing their health and academic success. Below are two examples of SS/HS sites that have successfully implemented this key component:

- » The **St. Lawrence-Lewis (New York) Boards of Cooperative Educational Services** created systems to better serve families. Local data showed that children who were not faring well in school often had families who needed extra support and who frequently had literacy issues. The SS/HS partners increased their outreach to these targeted families by piggybacking early childhood development and parenting classes with adult literacy activities. Working with the Department of Social Services as lead partner, the partners trained adult literacy providers to incorporate early childhood development and parenting skills into the literacy training.
- » **Newport-Mesa (California) Unified School District** is a very diverse district, economically and culturally, that serves 22,000 students in Orange County. The district’s SS/HS Initiative, Project ASK, began its efforts by addressing the needs of older students who had been suspended or expelled or who had low academic achievement. Many of these students came from low-income Latino families. Bilingual Outreach Advocates, with experience in both education and social services, contacted the families of these students by phone and in person to offer to help change the students’ behaviors by providing services and a skills program for parents. Project ASK chose a bilingual (English-Spanish) EBP parenting program, Parenting Wisely, which features materials friendly to families with limited education. The Family Outreach leader, a Hispanic woman with

broad credibility in the schools and community, said that the most important thing in working with this community was to be respectful, compassionate, and a good listener: “Even though I am Hispanic, I do not know more about their reality than they do.”

As the parenting program was implemented, the district collected data about the program’s impact in order to measure the relationship between parental participation in the program and changes in students’ behavior. After the first six months, the project began seeing improvements in student attendance, discipline, and social behaviors, and a decrease in truancy of almost 50 percent. By the end of the first semester, the district saw improvements in students’ academic achievement. In addition, the number of referrals to mental health professionals greatly increased. Word started spreading about the benefits of participating in the program, and families shared stories of improved communication with each other. After the first year, the program had a waiting list.

Tracking and communicating this success in the district has allowed ASK to expand parenting programs to parents of elementary school and pre-school children, addressing behavioral issues before they become more critical and interfere with children’s academic success. In addition, ASK implemented a software system that tracks students’ progress in real time; it monitors student behavior, attendance, and academic outcomes to quickly identify students and families who need support. As a result, instead of intervening to address problems that exist, the district focuses on promoting positive behaviors and preventing risk behaviors in a culturally competent manner.



Conclusion

We realize that our efforts have just begun, and this work will take 10–15 years to deeply take root. Our leaders are committed to institutionalizing these efforts. This programming will have a huge positive impact for these kids for the rest of their lives.

—Beverly Kingston, Project Director, Adams 12 Five Star Schools

Much can be learned from the collaborative, positive school discipline approaches used by SS/HS Initiatives across the country. Schools and districts *do* have the power to affect their school suspension and expulsion rates by using more effective, positive practices that engender measurably better student outcomes, rather than punitive practices that result in negative long-term consequences. By integrating the four key components described here, school and community partnerships can successfully implement evidence-based discipline strategies to help *all* students achieve healthy, productive lives and to break the school-to-prison pipeline.



Endnotes

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