

Replace Exclusionary Discipline Policies and Practices with Effective Alternatives



Supporting Research

What is the research evidence supporting this recommendation?

The Obama administration released a report in January 2014 calling for an end to zero-tolerance behavior policies which have been shown to: (1) increase long-term social and academic problems for students; (2) disproportionately affect boys, students in special education and students of color; and (3) often exclude students based on minor misconduct that does not mandate exclusionary responses. Based on a significant body of research, *GradMinnesota* recommends providing models and training for school leaders to revise exclusionary policies that (may unintentionally, but) actively push students out of school and instead provide alternatives that engage students and teach appropriate behavior.

The Negative Impact of Exclusionary Practices

Key Definitions (Pupil Fair Dismissal Act). *Exclusion* refers to an action that prevents school enrollment or re-enrollment of a student for a period of time. *Expulsion* refers to an action to prohibit an enrolled student from further attendance for up to 12 months from the date the pupil is expelled. An *out-of-school suspension* is a dismissal from school for more than one and up to ten school days. If a student has a disability, a removal from school for a shorter period of time may also be considered a suspension. Out-of-school suspensions have been linked to negative outcomes for students, schools and society. *In-school suspensions* temporarily remove students from the classroom.

Effects of Suspension. Although suspensions may remove student misbehavior from the classroom, research has shown for decades that suspensions do not help to improve either student behavior or school climate (Skiba, Shure, Middelberg & Baker, 2011). In fact, they actually heighten the incidence and severity of the behaviors they are designed to reduce. Suspensions are associated with negative student outcomes such as high levels of repeat offending, lower academic performance, higher school dropout rates, failure to graduate on time, decreased academic engagement, future disciplinary exclusion, and entering the juvenile justice system (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Recent research shows that being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school, from 16% for those not suspended to 32% for those suspended just once (Balfanz, 2013). In addition, contrary to the belief that suspending disruptive students will allow the rest of the class to maintain focus and learn, a recent large study revealed that high rates of suspensions negatively impacted math and reading scores for non-suspended students, possibly due to the anxiety and disconnection created in students in a very punitive culture (Perry & Morris, 2014).

Suspension takes away valuable academic engagement time from students. During the 2011-2012 school year, 3.45 million students were estimated to have lost instructional time due to out-of-school suspensions. Research has shown that schools with high suspension rates score lower on state accountability tests than other schools even when adjusting for demographic differences (Skiba & Rausch, 2005). In 2012-2013, 84% of all disciplinary actions taken by school administrators in Minnesota public schools were out-of-school suspensions, resulting in 45,964 suspensions and 109,495 missed instructional days (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014). In addition, the majority of suspensions were for minor, non-violent student behaviors that did not endanger others, for which there are many other responses that can be utilized to effectively address these issues and avoid the detrimental outcomes for students that result from out-of-school suspensions.

Disparities in Applying Exclusionary Practices. Students of color and students with disabilities are suspended and expelled at higher rates than their peers (Civil Right Data Collection, 2011-2012). For example, nationally, African American students make up 18% of total enrolled students in the country, but represent 46% of students receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions. African American/Black, American Indian and Hispanic students are suspended and expelled at rates that are disproportionate to their White peers in Minnesota. These data closely mirrors the academic achievement and graduation rates for some students of color (MDE, 2010). In addition, charter schools suspended higher percentage of black students and students with disabilities than traditional schools did. In middle and high schools, 12% more students with disabilities and 2.5% more black students were suspended in charters compared with noncharters (UCLA’s Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2016).

The Role of School Resource Officer. School resource officers (SROs) are law enforcement officers who are responsible for providing security and crime prevention services in the school environment. After experiencing dramatic increases in referrals to juvenile court for school-based offenses (Justice Policy Institute, 2011), some districts have rethought how SROs are used in schools. One approach to avoid criminization in school discipline is to limit the role of school resource officers, which could be done through (a) improving capacity of SROs to differentiate school misconduct from criminal conduct, (b) improving SRO knowledge about adolescent behavior, and (c) reducing referrals from school to juvenile and criminal court (Duke Center for Child and Family Policy & Duke Law School, 2015).

A Few Words on Punishment. Punishment is often used in school settings with the intention of modifying negative behavior. However, what punishments really do is “make the children angry...make it less likely that he will focus on how his actions affect others...Punishment can never buy us anything more than temporary compliance, and it does that at a disturbing cost” (Kohn, 2013). Students who are suspended or expelled are at greater risk of disengagement and diminished educational opportunities. When students are forced to leave the school environment, they are denied the opportunity to learn. Research shows that exclusionary discipline policies and practices can be remedied with more positive alternatives that teach appropriate behaviors and ensure students have necessary supports to succeed.

Positive Alternatives to Exclusionary Practices

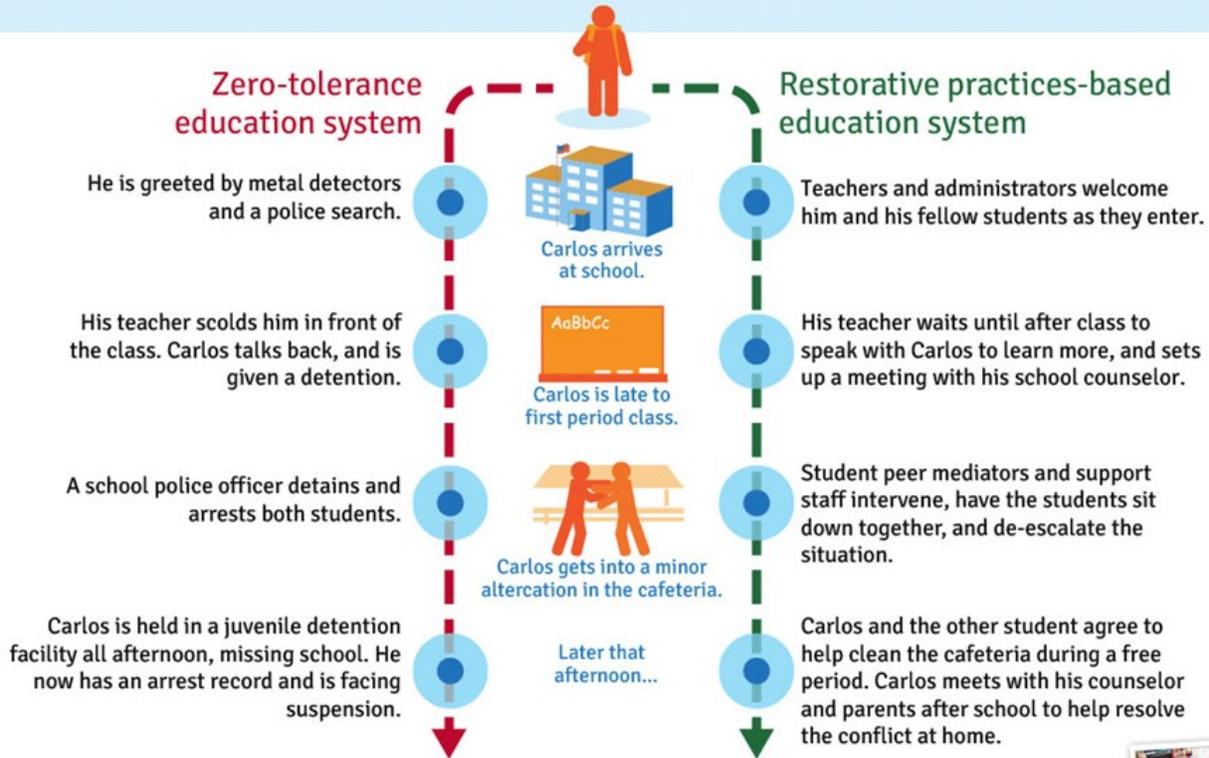
Students learn best in a safe and supportive environment. Research has shown when addressing disciplinary issues, exclusionary practices such as expulsion and suspension are not effective in either improving student behavior or school climate (Skiba, Shure, Middelberg & Baker, 2011). In order to ensure the success of youth in the classroom, it is important that viable alternatives to exclusionary practices be put into place. This document introduces three comprehensive approaches of alternatives that are evidence-based: restorative practices, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and social emotional learning.

What is Restorative Practices?

Restorative practices is an alternative that seeks to address student misbehavior while keeping students in school and holding them accountable for their actions. Restorative practices proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflicts and wrongdoings. This approach represents a paradigm shift from punitive practices. While punitive responses focus on punishment, restorative practices focus on accountability, problem-solving, and healing. This shift in thinking requires a change in personal attitudes and culture (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2012). The following visual, *A Tale of Two Schools*, shows how a restorative practices based education system can address behavior in a positive manner, teach new behaviors and repair harm - making a critical difference for students and staff.

A Tale of Two Schools

Carlos had a heated argument with his parents before leaving for school, so he's running late. Let's see the difference that restorative policies and practices can make.



Learn more about restorative practices:
www.otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices



The following table highlights the differences between the traditional approach to discipline and a restorative approach:

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

Source: Minnesota Department of Education, 2010.

To summarize, restorative practices “look not at rule violations but at the violation of relationships, and seeks to hold the youth responsible to the person who has been affected, challenging all to repair the relationships” (Riestenberg, 2011). Restorative practices utilizes dialogue between different parties involved in a conflict, including the victim, the offender, and members of the impacted community. In addition, in contrast to focusing on deficits, restorative practice focuses on the capacity of young people to reflect on the impact of their actions, take responsibility for their behaviors, and develop plans to repair harm. It also gives victims an opportunity to voice their suggestions for appropriate consequences.

There are many forms of restorative practices, such as circle process for teaching and conflict resolution, peer mediation and juries, and community conferencing that bring victims, offenders and their supporters together. Effective implementation of restorative practices has been shown (Porter, 2007) to

1. Decrease the number of detentions and suspensions
2. Reduce disciplinary problems, misbehaviors, bullying, and aggression
3. Promote social-emotional learning (IIRP, 2014)
4. Improve relationship among students; improve teacher-student relationships, which tends to narrow the racial-discipline gap/disparity (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2015), and
5. Transform schools' academic and social culture (Mirsky, 2007)

What are Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), commonly referred to as School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBIS), when applied at the school level, is a proactive approach to problem behavior, supported by additional interventions for small groups and individual students with further needs (Horner, Sugai & Vincent, 2005). PBIS emphasizes direct teaching of social behavior skills, rather than assuming students automatically know how they are expected to behave. Instead of punishing students for not following rules, staff focus on modeling and teaching expected behaviors through a positive system that incorporates practice, reinforcement and intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. PBIS promotes a positive and predictable school climate which can foster student attachment to school and provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional and academic learning (Osterman, 2000).

PBIS features a series of key elements ((Horner, Sugai & Vincent, 2005; Minnesota Department of Education, 2014):

- **Prevention** – Schools should seek to prevent problem behavior rather than responding to misconduct after it occurs.
- **School culture and behavioral expectations** – Schools must define the core social expectations and overtly teach the behaviors and skills associated with these expectations, which will form the basis for a school social culture.
- **School-wide implementation** – Schools should teach and practice these expectations throughout the entire school (classroom, lunchroom, restroom, playground, etc.)
- **Recognition of appropriate behavior** – Instances of appropriate student behavior should be recognized, acknowledged and encouraged on a regular basis.
- **Data** – Schools should carefully track and review disciplinary data and use it to inform decisions regarding approaches to problem behaviors.

Research has shown that PBIS

- Decreases the number of office discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions, therefore increasing instructional time (Bohanon et al., 2006; Galloway, Panyan, Smith, & Wessendorf, 2008)
- Improves school climate (Caldarella, 2011)
- Improves academic achievement (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006)

What is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2015).

The short-term goals of SEL programs are to:

- Promote students' self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills, and
- Improve student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school.

These, in turn, provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores.

Research shows that SEL can have a positive impact on school climate and promote a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students. Durlak et al.'s recent meta-analysis (2011) of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in schools indicates that students receiving quality SEL instruction demonstrated:

- Better academic performance: achievement scores an average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction;
- Improved attitudes and behaviors: greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behavior;
- Fewer negative behaviors: decreased disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals; and
- Reduced emotional distress: fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal.

SEL can be done through effective classroom instruction and student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom. For example, *Positive Action*, a K–12 program, aims to promote character development, academic achievement, and social-emotional skills and to reduce disruptive and problem behavior. The curriculum includes six units; some grades have a review for a seventh unit. All lessons are scripted and use classroom discussion, role-play, games, songs, and activity sheets or text booklets (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007).

What is Trauma Informed Care?

It is estimated that one half to two-thirds of children experience trauma before the age of 18 (Felitti et al., 1998; SAMHSA, 2015). Trauma has been defined as a response to a negative external event or series of events which surpasses the child's ordinary coping skills. It comes in many forms and includes experiences such as maltreatment, witnessing violence, or the loss of a loved one. Over the past few years, childhood events that cause trauma have been referred to as adverse childhood experiences or (ACEs). A 2011 survey conducted in Minnesota asked about the extent to which adults had experienced an adverse childhood experience (ACE) or traumatic experience before the age of 18 (such as physical, sexual, or verbal abuse, mental illness, alcoholism, or incarceration of a household member) (MDH, 2013). Over half of the Minnesotans that responded to the question reported experiencing at least one ACE in childhood, and those reporting one ACE were more likely to report other ACEs in childhood.

Impact: Research shows that traumatic experiences can impact brain development and behavior inside and outside of the classroom. Trauma impacts emotional regulation, memory, cognitive processing, social skills, and physical health (Terr, 1991; Shonk & Chicchetti, 2001). Trauma can adversely affect children's ability to learn, form relationships, communicate, and function appropriately in the classroom (Cole et al., 2005). These difficulties make it challenging to meet classroom learning expectations. As adults, the risk for health problems increases in a strong and graded fashion (e.g., alcohol and substance abuse, depression, anxiety, smoking) as the number of ACEs increases.

Solutions: Trauma-Informed Care is a growing movement that holds great promise for helping people to recover from the effects of adverse childhood experiences (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Applying the principles of Trauma-Informed Care can help to create supportive school environments with positive relationships that empower children to flourish and learn to their potential. Schools can help support all children in the development of healthy coping strategies and resilience in facing future struggles.

Approaches to address trauma have been developed and proven to be effective. These approaches can be categorized as: a) trauma-informed systems approaches that aim to shape organizations to be more trauma-sensitive in their work with children and families and b) trauma-specific treatment interventions that can be implemented at the individual level to address trauma and its symptoms (WDPI, 2014; Stevens, 2012). Both types of approaches can be used and applied in school settings. Trauma informed approaches represent a holistic method of shaping organizational culture, practices, and policies to be sensitive to the experiences and needs of traumatized individuals.

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