Best Practices: School Discipline

Incorporating evidence-based solutions into the Code of Student Conduct

Statistical Evidence of Success in Schools

Lincoln High School, Walla Walla, W.A. School leaders in this alternative school shifted approach to discipline by working with students to identify root causes of misbehavior, and using restorative interventions.

- 85% Drop in suspensions
- Graduation rate increased from less than 10% to nearly 60%

Baltimore, Maryland. When suspension rates reached an all time high of 26,000 students in 2005, the school district began revising its policies to promote positive intervention. In 2014, the State Board of Ed banned zero-tolerance policies and required schools to adopt a rehabilitative approach.

- From 2008-10 suspensions dropped by 60%
- In 2013 suspensions per year dropped to 8,620
- For African American boys, dropout rates decreased by 59% and graduation rate rose 16% from 2006-13

California. Widespread discipline reform across the state focused on restorative justice and conflict-resolution.

- In San Francisco, Richmond High School suspensions dropped by 47% in 3 years
- In Los Angeles, Garfield High School suspensions dropped from 510 in 2008-9 to 2 in the last 2 years

Restorative Practices

Restorative Justice Model is a dispute resolution tool that allows all sides of a dispute, victims and offenders alike, to become involved in defining the harm and devising remedies, and gives equal attention to community safety, victim’s needs, and offender accountability and growth.

1. Restorative Chat – one-on-one informal conversations with teacher/staff member and student as an immediate response to follow-up on an action that has caused harm to help the student correct the behavior in the present and future
2. Restorative Circles – informal discussions to address what occurred, repair the harm and develop solutions to prevent reoccurrence, involving relevant parties and support people if helpful
3. Fairness committees – made up of students, teachers, and staff that have been trained in restorative practices to identify the appropriate responses such as mediation, community service, and conflict resolution.

4. Mediated Conferencing – those harmed by an incident can meet with the person who caused the harm with assistance of a trained mediator, to express how they were impacted and get answers

Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports

PBIS is a research-based framework under which schools focus on prevention of problem behavior and positive interventions, model and teach positive behavior and skills, and monitor implementation.

1. Classroom Management Practices – implement social-emotional programs and curricula that teach students how to resolve conflicts, manage their emotions, and learn empathy skills
2. Conflict Resolution Skills – students, parents, teachers and staff engage in activities that promote problem-solving skills such as anger management, active listening, and effective communication
3. Functional Behavioral Assessment – Student Support Team (SST) gather information about students’ disruptive behavior and determine the approach to manage that student’s behavior & develop Behavioral Intervention Plan
4. Mentoring Program – SST pairs student with mentor (student, teacher or counselor) to help with their personal, social, academic development

5. Parent Outreach – inform parents of children’s behavior and seek their assistance in correcting inappropriate behavior
6. Community Service – allows students to participate in an activity that benefits the community (e.g. soup kitchen or cleaning up public spaces)
7. Referral to Counseling Services – for substance abuse, mental health, or other social services to students in need, Services can be school or community based
Proportionate Disciplinary Responses

**Proportionate Disciplinary Responses** is the alternative to “Zero-Tolerance” policies, and provides for graduated levels of response to inappropriate or disruptive behavior, which take into account severity of behavior, student’s age, maturity, and behavioral history. The goal is to eliminate inappropriately harsh consequences such as suspension or expulsion for minor offenses, and create clear expectations while providing circumstantial flexibility. For example:

- **Level 1** may address first time misbehaviors such as absences, disruptive behavior, or dress code violations with:
  - Classroom intervention (e.g. verbal correction by teacher, written apology, in-class time-out, detention) or
  - Student support team intervention (using PBIS or restorative practices)

- **Level 2** may address repetitive Level 1 misbehaviors, or more serious offenses such as alcohol or drug use, or fighting with other students, with:
  - Staff/Administrative Intervention (e.g. reprimand by administrator, loss of privileges, restorative practices, in-school suspension)

- **Level 3** may address behaviors such as repetitive Level 2 misbehaviors, or more serious offenses such as serious bullying, drug possession, or attacking school personnel, with:
  - Short-term suspension, preferably in-school, as limited a time as practicable
  - Referral services to substance abuse programs, counseling

- **Level 4** may address repeat Level 3 offenses and most severe behavior including possession of weapons, selling drugs, or bomb threats, with:
  - Extended suspension, no longer than necessary
  - Expulsion

Positive School Climate & Community

It is important to consider practices outside of the actual discipline policy. In order to achieve positive outcomes, the entire school community must work together to create a positive school climate.

**Positive school climate** involves the way teachers, students, parents, principals, staff and the school district relate to and interact with each other, and include:

- Training and resources for all staff to model positive behavior, communicate understanding and empathy, identify root causes of misbehavior and resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully

- Moral, and where necessary, professional support for students who are experiencing emotional crisis or trauma in their homes and communities

- Engaging academic and extracurricular activities that promote a sense of belonging

- Effective communication among schools, parents, and communities to actively involve all in regular review and update of discipline policy & decision-making

- A district-level advisory committee with representation by all stakeholders to oversee development of disciplinary practices