

## What Every Administrator Needs To Know About Alternatives to Suspension & Expulsion!

Administrator's Conference on Behavior  
October, 2006

Reece Peterson  
University of Nebraska—Lincoln  
Safe and Responsive Schools Materials  
developed with Russell Skiba  
Indiana University—Bloomington



## Over reliance on suspension and expulsion for discipline

If we support evidence-based practice,  
then what is the evidence for suspension?



PERCENT OF REFERRALS LEADING TO SUSPENSION BY SCHOOL

School	Percent of Incidents Suspended
1	11.3%
2	13.9%
3	16.5%
4	17.0%
5	17.2%
6	23.3%
7	26.1%
8	30.3%
9	32.2%
10	32.9%
11	34.0%
12	35.0%
13	37.9%
14	38.4%
15	58.9%
16	86.5%

## School Contributions to Suspension (Wu et. al, 1982)

- ◆ Attitude and behavior contribute
- ◆ But so do:
  - Overall suspension rate
  - Teacher attitudes
  - Administrative centralization
  - School governance
  - Perceptions of achievement
- ◆ More influence of school than student factors



“One could argue from this finding that if students are interested in reducing their chances of being suspended, they will be better off by transferring to a school with a lower suspension rate than by improving their attitudes or reducing their misbehavior.”

--(Wu et al., 1982)



## What Behaviors are Students Referred For? \*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ White students referred/suspended more for:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Smoking</li> <li>● Endangering</li> <li>● Obscene Language</li> <li>● Vandalism</li> <li>● Drugs/Alcohol</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Black students referred/suspended more for:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loitering</li> <li>● Disrespect</li> <li>● Excessive Noise</li> <li>● Threat</li> <li>● Conduct Interference</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|---|---|

\* “The Color of Discipline”: [www.indiana.edu/~iepc](http://www.indiana.edu/~iepc)



## Improved Student Behavior?

### ■ 30-50% of suspensions are repeat offenders

- "Suspension functions as a reinforcer...rather than as a punisher" (Tobin, Sugai & Colvin, 1996)

### ■ Correlation of suspension and dropout

### ■ Dropout or push-out?



## Improved School Safety or Climate?

### ◆ Schools with higher rates of suspension have:

- Higher student teacher ratios
- Lower academic quality ratings
- Pay less attention to school climate
- Spend disproportionate time on discipline
- Have less effective school governance



## Is Disciplinary Removal Fair?

### ◆ Disproportionality among poor, minorities is consistent finding

- Not due entirely to SES
- Do African-American students misbehave more?
  - No.



## Is IDEA an Obstacle to Effective School Discipline?

- ◆ Students with disabilities over-represented in suspension
- ◆ 75% of principals: IDEA has positive/neutral effect on discipline (GAO)
- ◆ Will using ineffective practice for more children make discipline more fair?



## Criteria of Effectiveness for Disciplinary Removal

### ◆ Treatment Integrity?

- Based on classroom, school rather than behavior
- Very little consistency from school to school

### ◆ Non-discriminatory?

- Consistently overused with minorities, low SES

### ◆ Effective outcomes?

- Correlated with repeat offense, dropout
- Correlated with poorer school climate



## Conclusions:

- ◆ 1. "Zero Tolerance" is not effective discipline. (See ABA policy.)
- ◆ 2. Suspension and expulsion
  - are overused,
  - have negative consequences
  - are generally ineffective in accomplishing their goals.



*Two systems of discipline, one for general education, and one for special education, seems "unfair".*

## Is there a way to return to one system of discipline for all students?

1. No expulsion for any student- use alternatives for all students!
2. Team decision making for all students- the power of teams!
3. Individual Behavior Plans for any student where it might help!



## If all students received these three-

- Alternative Programming
- Team decision making
- Individual behavior plans
- Effect on safety?
  - Safer or less safe?
- Effect on fairness
  - More or less fair?
- Effect on outcomes?
  - Likelihood of better or worse outcomes?



Dakota tribal wisdom says that when you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount.



## However, in education we often try other strategies with dead horses, including:

- Buying a stronger whip.
- Changing riders.
- Say things like, "This is the way we have always ridden this horse."
- Appointing a committee to study the horse.
- Arranging to visit other sites to see how they ride dead horses.
- Increasing the standards to ride dead horses.
- Appointing a tiger team to revive the dead horse.
- Creating a training session to increase our riding ability.
- Change the requirements declaring that "This horse is not dead."
- Harnessing several dead horses together for increased speed.
- Declaring that "No horse is too dead to beat."
- Providing additional funding to increase the horse's performance.
- Revisit the performance requirements for horses.



## Getting off the Dead Horse of Exclusionary Discipline

- How can we achieve better practice?
- How can we create supports for positive behavior?

### Creating new "discipline":

- Developing & implementing alternatives to suspension and expulsion
- Developing a framework for improving student behavior
- Creating the foundations for effective discipline



## Alternatives to Suspension & Expulsion



What are the alternatives to using "suspension"???  
(Suspension also leads to Expulsion)

Are there disciplinary options which might work better, and which might avoid exclusion and the problems it brings?



Traditional School  
Disciplinary Consequences

- ◆ Demotion
- ◆ Lowering grades
- ◆ Detention
- ◆ Saturday school

**Classroom consequences:**

- ❖ Writing "I will not \_\_\_," a hundred times.
- ❖ Staying after school
- ❖ More homework.
- ❖ Parent conference.
- ❖ Many others.

- 
- ◆ Suspension
  - ◆ Expulsion



What follows are ten examples of alternative consequences which could be included disciplinary alternatives

Use you school staff, students and parents to brainstorm options-creating awareness and support!  
**Formalize these!**

(The items listed as examples are not in any particular priority)



Top Ten - #1



**Mini-courses**

Alternatives to Suspension

Short courses or modules which students can complete on topics related to their behavior as a disciplinary consequence. Can include workbooks, test, oral reports, etc. Examples:

- alcohol; drugs
- conflict resolution
- anger control
- social skills topics
- appropriate communication skills



Top Ten - #2



**Parent Supervision**

Alternatives to Suspension

Parents should be invited to brainstorm with the school on how to address the behavior. One example might be to "suspend" the parent in to school by having the parent follow and supervise the student all day in school.



Top Ten - #3




**Counseling**

Alternatives to Suspension

Students might be required to participate in or receive some amount of counseling which focuses on behavioral needs.




Top Ten - #4




## Community Service

Alternatives to Suspension

Programs which permit the student to perform a required amount of time in community service in the school system or in the community. Examples- Volunteer hours at another school, a soup kitchen, park or other organization where this could be arranged.




Top Ten - #5




## Behavior Monitoring

Alternatives to Suspension

A variety of strategies to monitor behavior and academic progress might include cards checked after each class regarding behavior, self charting of behaviors, strategies to provide feedback to the student, etc.




Top Ten - #6




## Restitution

Alternatives to Suspension

Financial or in-kind. Permits the student to restore or improve the school environment. This can be done either to address problems caused by the student's behavior – vandalism, for example- or more generically to help or improve the school environment – such as picking up trash.




Top Ten - #7




## Problem Solving/ Contracting

Alternatives to Suspension

Use negotiation and problem solving approaches to assist student to identify alternatives. Then develop a contract with the student, which includes reinforcers for success, consequences for continuing problems.




Top Ten - #8



## Alternative Programming

Alternatives to Suspension

Changes in the student schedule, classes or course content; assignment to an alternative school or program; independent study or work experience programs. Should be tailored to student needs.



Top Ten - #9



## Appropriate In-school Suspension


Alternatives to Suspension

In school suspension which includes academic tutoring, instruction related to the student behavior problem such as social skills, and a clearly defined procedure to return to class as soon as the student is ready.

**Frank Sinatra**  
"My Way"




## Top Ten - #10



### Coordinated Behavior Plans


Alternatives to Suspension

Creation of a structured, coordinated behavior plan specific to the student and based on assessment of the quantity and purpose of the target behavior to be reduced; should focus on increasing desirable behavior, and replacing inappropriate behaviors.




## Expanding the Array of Disciplinary Alternatives

- ◆ Generate a list of non-exclusionary alternatives to responding to school or classroom disruption.
- ◆ Get as many as possible!!!
- ◆ Match clusters of consequences with levels of inappropriate behavior.
- ◆ Permit individual tailoring of consequences within the levels
- ◆ Use data to determine the effectiveness of consequences



## A "Tiered" Code of Conduct

Offense or Infraction	An Array of Consequences
Minor- Tardiness; Lack of homework;	Mini-course; detention; Parent Supervision
Moderate- Insubordination;	Counseling; Mini-course; Community service; Restitution
Serious- Drugs; weapons; assault.	Alternative programming; suspension;expulsion
Are supportive measures in place?	What are supportive measures for this student?




Develop a more sophisticated system of responding to different types of inappropriate behavior with an expanded array of disciplinary alternatives



## Consequences of an Expanded the Array of Alternatives


- ◆ What are the costs of the current practice?
- ◆ What would it take to implement these alternatives?
  - Time
  - Materials
  - Costs?
- ◆ What would be the potential benefits?
- ◆ What would be lost if fewer students were suspended, and for less time?
- ◆ What would be gained?



## Prerequisites!!

What does it take to make these consequences work?  
What supports for positive behavior are necessary to make consequences work?

The worlds best discipline consequences won't work without a foundation in place!!



Top Ten - #1

Supports for Positive Behavior

## Gather Data on Behavior- Analyze and Act!

Develop a school data system which permits key bits of data about students to be gathered, analyzed and used to make changes for school and individual students.

These might include: Office referrals; Surveys of parents, students & staff; Grades; Achievement Assessment Data; Attendance; etc.

Top Ten - #2

Supports for Positive Behavior

## Creating a Caring & Welcoming School Environment

Create a “tone” of belonging, caring and valuing of all individuals; Make everyone feel welcome, and that they belong.

School Climate

- ◆ Patterns of Communication and Problem Solving
- ◆ Patterns of Authority and Status
- ◆ Procedures for Developing & Implementing Rules
- ◆ Student belongingness
- ◆ Relationships with Parents & Community Forces
- ◆ Processes for Dealing with Personal Problems
- ◆ Curriculum & Instructional Practices
- ◆ The Physical Environment

Caring & Community In School

Top Ten - #3

Supports for Positive Behavior

## Consistent School Values/ Character Education

Curriculum and organization features of schools that promote the development of fundamental values in children. Create and explicit list of desirable goals for student behavior, teach and apply them routinely...

The Six Pillars of Character  
(Character Counts!)

Character Education

- Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Fairness
- Caring
- Good citizenship

Top Ten - #4

Supports for Positive Behavior

## Conflict De-escalation Training

Programs which teach staff and students to recognize and to disengage from escalating conflict.

### Top Ten - #5

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## Mediation Programs



Programs which teach students about non-violent conflict resolution, and which permit students the chance to use and experience these in school. Peer-mediation programs may be only one example.



### Top Ten - #6

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## Positive Office Referrals/ Recognition



Programs which identify and reward individual students for appropriate behavior; permits recognition, reinforcement and celebration of all kinds of "good" behavior.



### Top Ten - #7

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## Increased Parent Communication & Involvement



Programs which involve a variety of parents and community members in functions and activities within the school. Improves systems of communication with parents.



### Top Ten - #8

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## Efforts to Build Adult-Student Relationships



Programs which offer opportunities for students to develop individual relationships with staff.



### Top Ten - #9

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## Early Identification & Intervention



Programs which permit systematically screen students for potential behavior problems, and which provide positive supports for the students identified as at "risk."



### Top Ten - #10

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## School-wide Discipline Program



Programs which develop a common terminology and consistent approach to discipline across staff in a school. Responsibilities of students & staff are identified; Consequences consistently enforced.



## School-wide Discipline: Making It Work

School-wide  
Discipline  
Program

- ◆ Assess the need among teachers
- ◆ Do we need a common discipline system?
  - Should we choose a packaged program?
  - Can we develop our own program?
- ◆ Design an in-service plan
  - Successful programs: Set limits, but emphasize positive behaviors
  - Consultation; training; other?



## School-wide Discipline Programs

### Examples:

- ◆ Assertive Discipline
- ◆ Boys Town Administrative Model
- ◆ Discipline with Dignity
- ◆ Cooperative Discipline
- ◆ Democratic Discipline
- ◆ Discipline with Purpose
- ◆ Positive Classroom Discipline
- ◆ Responsible Classroom Management

School-wide  
Discipline  
Program



## School & Classroom Discipline: What We Know

School-wide  
Discipline  
Program

- ◆ Properly implemented strategies can:
  - Decrease suspensions, expulsions, drop-out rates, classroom disruptions,
  - Decrease teacher stress; lower burnout
  - Increase on-task behavior, academic achievement
- ◆ Consistency between classroom and school increases effectiveness
- ◆ Consequences are identified for positive and for negative behavior.



## Others? - #11 & beyond

Supports for  
Positive  
Behavior

## Bullying Prevention & Intervention



Programs which teach students about bullying behaviors, and how they can be responded to and reported in school. Specific interventions are created for both bullies and victims.



## Administrators can:

- ◆ Move away from Zero Tolerance policies
  - Focus on changing and teaching behavior
  - Focus on effective discipline
  - Avoid over representation, and other problems
- ◆ Create more discipline options
- ◆ Make Codes of Conduct more sophisticated
- ◆ Insure foundations or “supports” are in place



## Resources from Safe & Responsive Schools Project:

<http://www.unl.edu/srs>

- ◆ The SRS Guide
  - Overview and Framework
  - Process Guide
    - Detailed procedures
    - Safe & Responsive Schools Surveys
  - Resource Guide
    - Fact sheets (See handouts at registration desk)
    - Other resources based on comprehensive model
- ◆ Websites
  - Access to materials when available
  - Samples of school produced products
- ◆ Consultation



## Other Resources

### References

- Peterson, R. (Spring, 2005). Ten Alternatives to Suspension. *Impact*, 18(2), 10-11. (Impact is a publication of the College of Education & Human Development, University of Minnesota.)
- Peterson, R.L., Miller, C. & Skiba, R. (Spring, 2004). A Framework for Planning Safe and Responsive Schools. *Beyond Behavior*, 13(3), 12-16.
- Skiba, R., Peterson, R., Miller, C., Ritter, S. & Simmons, A. (2004). The Safe and responsive schools project: A school reform model for implementing best practices in violence prevention. Chapter 40. Submitted to the *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety: From Research to Practice*.
- Skiba R. J., Peterson, R. L. & Williams, T. (January, 1999). The dark side of zero tolerance: Can punishment lead to safe schools? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(5), 372-381. Condensed and republished in *Education Digest*.
- Skiba R. J., Peterson, R. L. & Williams, T. (August, 1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 20(3), 1-21.

### Other Links

- The American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Committee Report on "Zero Tolerance Policy". <http://discussions.abanet.org/ornjst/jjuv/zerotolreport.html>
- Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. A variety of brief articles are available on this website. <http://ici.umn.edu/products/newsletters.html>
- Institute on Violent and Destructive Behavior, University of Oregon. <http://iadv.org/education/zero-tolerance>



*Reece L. Peterson*

202A Barkley Center  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0732  
402-472-5480  
rpeterson1@unl.edu

**Website:**  
<http://www.unl.edu/srs>

*Russell Skiba*

Indiana Education Policy Center  
100 Smith Research  
2805 E. 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
Bloomington, IN 47408  
812-855-5549  
skiba@indiana.edu

