

Research Brief

Alternatives to Suspension

Question: What are some alternatives to suspension?

In a Nutshell

Suspension from school is directly related to student learning. When students are suspended from school they are deprived of instructional time. Often the students that are suspended most frequently are those behind academically. Principals have worked with their staff to identify several alternatives to school suspension. First and foremost, is the importance of a clear discipline code that supports positive student behavior. It is also important to be proactive rather than reactive and to build capacity for appropriate student behavior.

Summary of Findings:

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) states that the purpose of suspension from school is "...to punish students, alert parents and protect other students and school staff." According to Advocates for Children and Youth, "Schools typically punish children who are behind academically by depriving them of instructional time. Because instructional time is directly related to academic achievement, the over representation of minority and disabled students in school suspensions has the additional impact of predisposing these students to underachieve academically" (2006). Research on school suspension indicates that:

- suspension only works for students who want to be in school
- repeated suspensions are not an effective form of school discipline
- children who seem to get suspended repeatedly, have little to no supervision at home, so a suspension is often a free day
- when not in school, children are more likely to become involved in crime, be sexually active, carry a weapon, and use drugs and/or alcohol
- they have a higher risk of dropping out
- those who receive free and reduced lunch are more likely to be suspended
- African-American students are twice as likely to be disciplined as Caucasian students
- students who come from single parent homes are suspended two to four times more than those living in two parent homes
- pupils who were suspended several times have a "C" or lower GPA (Advocates for children and youth-Voices for Maryland's children, 2006; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Clark, S, n.d; In-school suspension, n.d.).

There are times when suspending a student is very appropriate. Maintaining a safe school with appropriate disciplinary measures while combating the negative effects of suspension is important.

Fewer discipline issues emerge in classrooms where teachers keep students academically engaged and their classroom rules and consequences are supported by school policies. Similarly, suspension rates tend to be lower in schools that are proactive versus reactive, where the

discipline code, expectations, rules, consequences and follow through are clear, and where suspension is a last resort for only very serious offenses. The research strongly suggests that schools work with outside groups such as health and social service agencies, in order to support students and their families.

Setting the Stage for Alternatives

The literature suggests several strategies that can be deployed to create a climate supportive of alternatives to suspension.

- Provide on-going staff development on classroom management, academic engagement and differentiation
- Supply opportunities for new teachers to observe their “challenging” students in other classes as well as have these teachers observe experienced teachers
- Offer courses for parents on how they can be actively involved in and aware of their teenager’s life
- Examine school climate and determine what is and is not supporting the desired behaviors
- Establish a school-wide discipline code with clearly articulated levels of consequences
- Teach sportsmanship in physical education classes
- Offer instruction in bullying prevention for all stakeholders
- Provide rewards and incentives for positive behavior
- Examine data. Who is being referred? Why are they being referred? How often and for what offense(s) is the student being referred? Does the punishment fit the crime?
(Advocates for children and youth-Voices for Maryland’s children, 2006; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Clark, S., n.d.; Delisio, E. R., 2007; Peterson, R. L., n.d.)

Alternatives to Suspension

Research has also identified several practices that may be used as alternatives to suspension from school.

- Implement a peer mediation and/or conflict resolution program
- Develop an individualized self-management plan as applicable
- Require a parent to come to school with the student to help monitor their behavior
- Hold a conference with the student and parent(s)
- Develop an Intervention School Based Assistance Team
- Assure that punishments fit the infraction (i.e. a food fight or graffiti may have the student cleaning the cafeteria, walls, sweeping up rooms, etc.)
- Mandate required mini-courses where the topic is related to inappropriate behaviors and teach skills in how to deal/handle the same situation(s)
- Provide time for the student to meet with the school counselor to talk about and attempt to resolve the issue(s)
- Conduct after-school detention; Friday School; Saturday School
- Implement an in-school suspension program
(Advocates for children and youth-Voices for Maryland’s children, 2006; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Clark, S., n.d.; Delisio, E. R., 2008; In-school suspension, n.d.; Peterson, R. L., n.d; Teach Safe Schools, n.d.)

Resources

- Advocates for children and youth-Voices for Maryland's children. (2006). School suspension and alternatives. Retrieved online
http://www.soros.org/initiatives/baltimore/articles_publications/articles/issue_20060418/issuebrief_20060418.pdf
This is a comprehensive description not only of alternatives to suspension, but includes the data gathered from the school districts in Maryland regarding the outcomes of different alternative programs.
- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2003). Out of school suspension and promotion. Retrieved online
<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;112/5/1206.pdf>
Written for pediatricians, this article describes ways in which doctors can be of assistance and support to children who are experiencing discipline issues.
- Burns, J. (n.d.). Keys to an effective in-school suspension program. Retrieved online
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Keys-To-An-Effective-In-School-Suspension-Program&id=776256>
A brief yet descriptive piece about the important components necessary for a productive in-school suspension program is provided.
- Clark, S. (n.d.). Alternatives to suspension keep kids in school. Retrieved online
<http://www.catalyst-cleveland.org/archives/12-01/1201story2.htm>
A concise article about in-school suspension programs in Cleveland, OH is described.
- Delisio, E. R. (2007). Evaluating in-school suspension programs. Retrieved online
http://www.education-world.com/a_issues/chat/chat082.shtml
An interview with Dr. Anne Wheelock regarding effective programs and support for positive discipline is reported.
- Delisio, E. R. (2008). In-school suspension: A learning tool. Retrieved online
http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin329.shtml
A description of the components for successful secondary in-school suspension programs is provided in this brief piece.
- In-school suspension. (n.d.) Retrieved online
<http://www.tandl.leon.k12.fl.us/programme/Suspensions.html>
A comprehensive description of different types of in-school suspension programs and a list of the components of successful and unsuccessful programs is provided.
- Is your in-school suspension a place or a program? (2008). Retrieved online
<http://socyberty.com/education/is-your-in-school-suspension-a-place-or-a-program/>
This is an extensive and descriptive piece about different in-school suspension programs and the importance of this beginning at the middle school level.
- Jones, T. (2004). Conflict resolution education: The field, the findings, the future. Retrieved online
http://www.creducation.org/resources/resolving_conflicts/files/Jones%20article.pdf

The comprehensive article defines conflict resolution and provides examples of how it can be used in the different levels from K-12.

- Peterson, R. L. (n.d.). Ten alternatives to suspension. Retrieved online <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/182/over5.html>
This article suggests alternatives to suspension along with components that should be in place in order for a discipline program to be effective.
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports. (n.d.). Maryland Public Schools. Retrieved online <http://www.pbismaryland.org/WhatIsSWPBS.pdf>
This site describes the PBIS tenants that are used in the Maryland Public Schools.
- Standards and protocols. (2008) Maryland Public Schools. Retrieved online <http://www.pbismaryland.org/documents/PBISStandardsandProtocols82008.pdf>
These are the specific guidelines for the PBIS program used by Maryland Public Schools System.
- Teach Safe Schools. (n.d.). Alternatives to out-of-school suspension. Retrieved online <http://www.teachsafeschools.org/alternatives-to-suspension.html>
Some suggestions for consequences prior to giving a suspension are made in this article.
- Walker, K. (2006). In-school suspension alternatives. Research Brief. Retrieved online <http://www.principalspartnership.com/issalternatives.pdf>
This brief describes different types of alternatives to in-school suspensions.

Alternative School Programs

- Community Alternative for School Suspension. Oshwa, Ontario. Retrieved online <http://www.jhsdurham.on.ca/cass/>
- Sleg, A. (n.d.) Program alternatives to school suspension (PASS). New York. Retrieved online http://www.hfmboces.org/HFMStudentServices/alt_HighSchool/pass.htm#top%20of%20page
The instructional program at PASS is designed to develop a high level of self-worth in each student by capitalizing on the unique interests and capabilities of each student.

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