

Alternative Approaches to School Discipline

May 8, 2013



Sound Discipline at Interagency Academy, Seattle Jody McVittie and Anthony Kane

Please describe the underlying values and ideologies behind your discipline program:

We use discipline as an opportunity to teach the skills students need to succeed in school and life. Students learn best when they have hope they can fix their mistakes. We hold students accountable to mutually agreed upon expectations, but if students cannot meet them we work towards a new solution. Sometimes removal from school is necessary, but we make an extra effort to ensure students come back to school prepared to learn.

What makes this model of discipline different than traditional, punitive discipline?

Our fundamental mission is to engage each student in high levels of learning, which we believe occurs best with strong relationships built on mutual respect and trust. In a Sound Discipline school, every adult: understands the quality of relationship and school climate are critical to student learning; implements principles of respect and encouragement; fosters a sense of belonging and meaning in youth; focuses on long-term solutions; views mistakes and misbehavior as opportunities to learn; and questions the tradition of adult control, rewards, and punishments. Based on the robust theories of Alfred Adler and current brain science, our goal is to teach people to do the right thing, even when no one is looking.

How can you tell your program is successful?

We monitor data on office referrals and measure student and staff feedback. Our leadership team meets monthly to look at patterns of success and identify areas that need improvements. The leadership team then makes recommendations to staff.

How does this program specifically address racial disproportionality?

We track data broken down by race, and our leadership team works to directly address the disparities that show up. Each school chooses their own strategy for addressing disproportionality, but data is a key tool in identifying where the disparities exist.

How long after implementation did you begin to see an impact?

In a recent elementary school, we tracked a reduction in office referrals within 2 months of implementing the program. The impact varies in each school.

Have you modified your student handbook as a result of implementing your program?

Yes, we work with principals to minimize the amount of time students are out of class.

Which rule infractions merit out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion?

Schools follow district-established policies for suspension and expulsion.

Restorative Justice at First Creek Middle School, Tacoma Nicholas Bradford and Brad Brown

Please describe the underlying values and ideologies behind your discipline program:

Harm is a violation of relationships. When harm occurs, relationships need to be rebuilt or repaired in order to achieve justice. Youth who cause harm need to be held accountable, hear the impact of their actions, make active choices and make amends, and know they are welcome and supported in the school. Opportunities to build empathy increase the satisfaction of all parties and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

What makes this model of discipline different than traditional, punitive discipline?

Restorative Justice is an empowering experience for all parties. Youth who caused harm have an opportunity to make things better. Youth who experienced harm have voice in the process. The community who was indirectly harmed has an opportunity to support both the victim and offender. Restorative Justice changes the paradigm around guilt and innocence towards a perspective that recognizes, "this happened, now how do we make things better and make this less likely to occur in the future?"

How can you tell your program is successful?

The goal of Restorative Justice is to reduce out-of-school suspensions and detentions through the use of meaningful consequences and dialogue. Often, a by-product of a successful program is greater satisfaction in the way students, teachers, administrators, and parents resolve conflicts. When there is balance, students are better learners and classrooms are more productive.

How does this program specifically address racial disproportionality?

Restorative Justice works to make everyone feel like they belong to a larger community. Often, schools have cultures that make students feel like they don't belong; that they are different and somehow less able to fit in. Exclusionary discipline policies exacerbate this message. Restorative Justice alters that process—instead of implying students aren't wanted on campus, Restorative Justice reinforces relationships and community throughout the school. It uses conflict as an opportunity to strengthen ties to peers, adults, and school community.

How long after implementation did you begin to see an impact?

The implementation process for Restorative Justice policies is complicated, but with dedication by the school community and a clear plan, results are measurable in the first 3-6 months.

Which rule infractions merit out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion?

Schools follow district-established policies for suspension and expulsion.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)**Cascade Middle School, Highline****Tricia Robles and Anni Mizuta****Please describe the underlying values and ideologies behind your discipline program**

PBIS is not a program; it's a shift in thinking about problem behavior. It's an instructional framework and a prevention-based model that promotes positive behavior and important social skills all students need to be successful. PBIS focuses on an approach that clearly acknowledges students for demonstrating positive behavior. We get more of what we attend to.

What makes this model of discipline different than traditional, punitive discipline?

PBIS is a team-based process for schools to implement practices that support student and staff behavior. It is a 3-tiered system that incentivizes good behavior and applies targeted solutions for students needing additional support. The first tier affects the majority of students and teachers in the building by setting expectations that help establish a positive learning environment. The second tier is the Check, Connect, and Expect Program, which allows adults to spend individual time with students who need additional guidance. The third tier is similar to in-school suspension; it is a level of intervention reserved for students with chronic behavior issues who need more supervision and support.

How can you tell your program is successful?

We track and analyze data regularly through the use of a school-wide software system. With this tool, we can identify students who need more support and reward students who are doing well. We know PBIS is effective when we are able to keep more students at tier one and two and keep them from escalating to tier three. We measure discipline referrals, academic outcomes, and attendance records. We can also identify patterns by recording when and where disruptions are occurring.

How does this program specifically address racial disproportionality?

PBIS sets clear expectations for all students. Our policies are transparent, so all students are taught and held to the same set of expectations. This is also something we communicate with families in the district. Because PBIS incorporates a lot of professional development in its implementation, it can be used in conjunction with other models that teach cultural proficiency.

How long after implementation did you begin to see an impact?

Generally, it takes 3-5 years for full implementation of the 3-tiered system. That said, schools often see a 40-60% reduction in discipline referrals even in the first year of implementation.

Have you modified your student handbook as a result of implementing your program?

We work with the district to outline clear, positive expectations for student behavior. We've removed or edited some of the negative rules to align with the values of PBIS. Soon our district will look into actual policies that can reduce out-of-school suspensions.

Which rule infractions merit out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion?

Schools follow district-established policies for suspension and expulsion.