In the following report, Hanover Research reviews school-wide disciplinary alternatives to zero tolerance policies. An overview of three discipline models is provided along with case studies of successful implementation. The report concludes with an overview of supplementary interventions intended to improve student behavior and academic outcomes.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Concerns regarding the negative impact and racially disparate applications of zero tolerance policies have led to calls for more effective, egalitarian disciplinary models. New disciplinary models are designed to address the root of infractions, explicitly teaching desired behavior, and reinforce communication and socio-emotional development. Programs tend to fall into two broad categories: school-wide policies and targeted intervention strategies. This report provides an overview of interventions at both of these levels in the following sections:

- **Section One** presents an overview of the literature on the effects of zero tolerance policies. It specifically addresses disparities in suspended populations, the reasons for student suspension, and the efficacy of zero tolerance in creating a safe and effective learning environment.
- **Section Two** reviews three alternatives to zero tolerance: School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Restorative Justice, and Social and Emotional Learning. Profiles of school districts that have successfully employed each approach are included.
- **Section Three** summarizes targeted disciplinary intervention strategies at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

KEY FINDINGS

- **School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Restorative Justice, and Social and Emotional Learning** are three alternative disciplinary models that have been shown to reduce suspensions and benefit student achievement. These models are implemented in many school districts as alternatives to zero tolerance policies. Each has proven successful in application, as illustrated in the report’s case studies.

- **School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)** instills positive behavioral expectations in students through a three-tiered intervention strategy. General supports are administered to the entire student body while targeted disciplinary interventions are reserved for at-risk and high-risk students. A large body of research supports the program’s ability to reduce suspensions and office disciplinary referrals and to improve academic achievement. SWPBIS has the potential to reduce suspensions in school districts, as evidenced by Denver City School District.
• The Restorative Justice (RJ) model is designed to identify the root cause of student behavioral problems and heal the school community through structured mediation between victim and offender. Though implementation varies from school to school, most RJ programs use victim-offender mediation, talking circles, and peer mediation to find the cause of a disciplinary infraction and identify concrete ways to rectify the offense. Though less research has been conducted on this model, early studies suggest its ability to reduce levels of disciplinary infractions and suspensions. Oakland Unified School District experienced a drop in suspensions and expulsions after implementing RJ programming.

• Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) builds students’ social and emotional skills to prevent disciplinary infractions and prepare students to lead healthy lives. SEL programming tends to be delivered through multiple short lessons each week. Curriculum teaches students healthy emotional and behavioral responses both in and out of the classroom. There is significant evidence suggesting this approach can decrease problem behaviors and increase academic performance. Cleveland Metropolitan School District reported improvements in students’ social and emotional competence after implementing one such SEL program.

• Successful disciplinary interventions at the elementary and middle school levels tend to focus on prevention and early intervention. Programs offered at these levels take a preventative approach by teaching young students how to healthily manage their emotions, relationships, schoolwork, and transitions. Effects of successful implementation include improved external behavior and academic achievement.

• Effective disciplinary interventions at the high school level emphasize targeted response to problematic behavior. Interventions at higher grade levels focus on identifying students with behavioral problems and providing them with support to address and manage their emotions. Research suggests that successful implementation results in a decreased number of suspensions and improved academic performance.

• Research provides little evidence that zero tolerance policies create safer, more effective schools. Instead, zero tolerance has been shown to disproportionately punish and exclude minority students and students with disabilities from the school community. Research indicates that these demographics are suspended at much higher rates than their white peers and are often punished more harshly for the same offenses.

• Studies show that suspension is correlated with increased likelihood of imprisonment. Although it is logical that students who are the subject of punitive action in school may be more likely to disobey the laws of society, proponents of alternative strategies argue that positive disciplinary approaches are more likely than out-of-school suspensions to result in positive outcomes for at-risk students.
SECTION I: THE IMPACT OF ZERO TOLERANCE

Since the inception of the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994, zero tolerance disciplinary policies have taken hold in many America school districts. This crack-down on disciplinary infractions has led to a dramatic increase in the number of out-of-school suspensions. In the 2009-2010 school year, one out of every nine secondary school students had been suspended at least once.\(^1\) Suspension and expulsion rates have increased even as rates of school violence have plateaued or declined in recent years.\(^2\)

These trends, coupled with the disproportionate numbers of minority and disabled students affected by zero tolerance policies, have shed doubt on the equity of zero tolerance policies. The following section will delve deeper into these considerations. Especially noteworthy are critiques of the efficacy of out-of-school suspension as a means of improving student behavior, academic achievement, and community engagement.

DISPROPORTIONALITY IN AFFECTED STUDENT GROUPS

One accusation consistently leveled at zero tolerance policies in schools is that they disproportionately affect minority students and students with disabilities. Statistics from the Civil Rights Project’s 2012 report on disproportionate discipline clearly show that black students are suspended at a rate more than three times higher than their white peers.\(^3\) Figure 1.1 on the following page depicts the number of students suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 school year, the most recent available data. African American, American Indian, and Latino students all experience significantly higher levels of suspension.

Discipline disparities are caused in part by the fact that black students are subject to more frequent and harsher punishment than their white peers for the same infractions. A meta-analysis of relevant research showed that discipline is enacted disproportionately against students of low socioeconomic status and minority students. Not only did this include higher rates of suspension for each group, but it also extended to the level of severity of in-school punishment.\(^4\)


Experts note similar trends in data collected in 2008 by North Carolina, which show that black first-time offenders are suspended at higher rates than white first-time offenders for the same minor infractions. Figure 1.2 presents the compiled data. Some infractions show over 20 percent difference between black and white student suspensions.

**Figure 1.1: Students Suspended (Out-of-School) at Least Once During the 2009-2010 School Year, as a Percentage of Total Enrollment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Civil Rights Project

**Figure 1.2: NC Suspension Rates, First-Time Offenders by Race and Infraction, 2006-2007**

Source: The Civil Rights Project

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7 Ibid., p. 7.
Such discrepancies might make sense if black students committed infractions at a higher rate than white students, but studies have shown that this is not the case. In this vein, “investigations of student behavior, race, and discipline have found no evidence that African Americans misbehave at a significantly higher rate.” In fact, one study found that white students tended to be disciplined for more serious offenses (e.g. vandalism, drugs, and alcohol) than black students who were referred for disrespect, excessive noise, and other lesser offenses. "Thus, far from engaging in higher levels of disruptive behavior, African-American students appear to be at risk for receiving a range of more severe consequences for less serious behavior."

In addition to minority overrepresentation, students with disabilities are also suspended at a higher rate than other students. The 2009-2010 data analyzed by the Civil Rights Project show that, across the nation, students with disabilities are suspended at about twice the rate of their non-disabled peers. Figure 1.3 depicts these statistics disaggregated by racial group and disability status. The national average for all racial groups is a 7-percent suspension rate for students without disabilities and an almost doubled rate of 13 percent for students with disabilities.

Figure 1.3: Percentage of Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions, by Race and Disability Status, 2009-2010 School Year

Source: The Civil Rights Project

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9 Ibid., p. 12.
10 Ibid., p. 12.
12 Ibid.
These inequities must be understood in relation to research that suggests that suspension has less to do with student behavior than classroom and school factors. A study of nearly one million students in Texas “found that the likelihood of an adolescent being suspended had more to do with school factors than with race, poverty, student demographics, or the student’s past behavior.” 13 Studies have linked several characteristics to rates of suspension, including:

- Principal and teacher attitudes
- Administrative centralization
- Quality of school governance
- Teacher perception of student achievement
- Racial makeup of school

In the cases where misbehavior is, in fact, an issue, teachers have other tools at their disposal besides out-of-school suspension. Student misbehavior is shown to be inversely proportional to a teacher’s ability to manage their classroom. Though teachers and administrators tend to view misbehavior as a decision made by the student, research suggests “an inverse relationship between student misbehavior and a teacher’s ability to engage students. As engagement goes up, misbehavior and suspensions tend to go down.” 15 Thus, misbehavior can often be prevented by effective classroom management.

**REASONS FOR SUSPENSION**

Zero tolerance policies were initially meant as a strategy to deter guns and violence in schools but have increasingly become a tool used against minor disciplinary infractions. Zero tolerance policies have moved beyond mandatory suspensions for gun possession, eventually encompassing all manner of minor misbehaviors.16 In an analysis of several studies examining the behaviors leading to suspension, the majority of citations were for disruption, disrespect, and other behavioral infractions as opposed to drugs or weapons possession. The leading behaviors resulting in suspension were:

- Disobedience or defiance of authority,
- Fighting,
- Class disruption,
- Non-compliance with assigned discipline, and
- Use of profanity.

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Thus, zero tolerance policies, like out-of-school suspension, became increasingly meted out for less grave, and often subjective, offenses. One critic, Russell Skiba of the Indiana Education Policy Center, notes:

> There is some tendency to assume that these suspensions or expulsions for trivial incidents are simply idiosyncratic or aberrations that occur in districts characterized by an overzealous administration. Yet the ubiquity of these ‘trivial incidents’ across time and location suggests that the over-extension of school sanctions to minor misbehavior is not anomalous, but rather is inherent in the philosophy and application of zero tolerance.18

**ZERO TOLERANCE’S EFFICACY**

Critics of zero tolerance policies argue that there is no evidence to support the approach’s efficacy. According to Skiba, “there appears to be little evidence, direct or indirect, supporting the effectiveness of suspension or expulsion for improving student behavior or contributing to overall school safety.”19 Instead, the overwhelming majority of research correlates zero tolerance suspensions with increased potential for future suspension and/or dropout. In contrast, the alternative disciplinary models profiled later in this report are expressly designed to improve offenders’ future actions and outcomes.

Demonstrating the troubling consequences of zero tolerance, one Texas-based study found that school discipline correlates with a 29-percent increase in high school dropout.20 As a result, “for troublesome or at-risk students, the most well-documented outcome of suspension appears to be further suspension, and eventually school dropout.”21

Zero tolerance policies are also linked by research to increased risk of contact with the criminal justice system. Suspension releases students predisposed to problematic behavior from parental and school oversight, opening the door for them to become increasingly involved in criminal activities. Furthermore,

> Suspension and expulsion may set individuals who already display antisocial behavior on an accelerated course to delinquency by putting them in a situation in which there is a lack of parental supervision and a greater opportunity to socialize with other deviant peers.”22

One investigation conducted in Texas found that expelled or suspended students are nearly three times as likely as peers to “have contact with the justice system the following year, supporting previous findings that exclusionary school discipline practices lead to a greater

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19 Ibid., p. 13.
chance of incarceration.”

While logic suggests that the type of student likely to be suspended may be more likely to break the law than a student who is well-behaved in the classroom. Nevertheless, some research suggests that unnecessarily harsh zero tolerance disciplinary policies may in fact trigger student misbehavior by alienating students from their school community:

...student perceptions of the effectiveness of various school disciplinary actions are often significantly at odds with the perceptions of teachers and administrators. While school personnel see school disruption as primarily a student choice and discipline as a reaction to that choice, students, especially at-risk students, often see confrontational classroom management or school disciplinary strategies as playing a significant role in escalating student misbehavior.

These considerations raise serious questions about the efficacy of exclusionary zero tolerance policies. The next sections offer alternative approaches designed to support positive outcomes for all students.

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SECTION II: ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL-WIDE DISCIPLINARY MODELS

As schools reevaluate their use of zero tolerance policies, educators are turning to several alternative school-wide approaches to discipline. The most widely implemented and documented models are School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). These approaches take a more holistic approach to discipline than zero tolerance policies by setting behavioral expectations, grading punishment by severity of infraction, and addressing the root of discipline problems. An in-depth discussion and a case study of successful implementation for each model follow.

SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

The School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports approach has been adopted by 9,000 schools in 44 states.25 Designed to replace disjointed disciplinary policies at various levels of school administration, SWPBIS establishes consistent expectations and behavioral supports for the entire school system, including both classroom and non-classroom environments.

SWPBIS is not a prescribed program for which applications are the same regardless of school environment or student population. Instead, SWPBIS builds on existing knowledge within a district “and is designed to ensure that interventions are adapted to local conditions.”26 This enables schools to use resources already at their disposal to improve disciplinary and student achievement outcomes in their district. As a result,

Rather than relying entirely on outside expertise, SWPBIS involves the development of a leadership team within the school or school district to identify effective research-based intervention practices, garner monetary and political support, train and coach staff, and monitor progress.27

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

SWPBIS focuses on “defining, teaching, and supporting” student behavior guidelines meant to maintain a safe school environment conducive to learning.28 The approach emphasizes teaching positive social behaviors instead of punishing negative behavior. According to the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Effective Schoolwide Interventions:

Research has shown that the implementation of punishment, especially when it is used inconsistently and in the absence of other positive strategies, is ineffective. Introducing, modeling, and reinforcing positive social behavior is an important step

26 Ibid., p. 8.
27 Ibid., p. 8.
of a student's educational experience. Teaching behavioral expectations and rewarding students for following them is a much more positive approach than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding.29

Positive behavioral expectations are set at the beginning of the year, taught to students, and reinforced throughout the year. Educators use behavioral infractions as teaching opportunities. The system offers behavioral supports for students at three levels of intensity:30

- **Primary Level** – School-wide
- **Secondary Level** – Classroom
- **Tertiary Level** – Individual

Figure 2.1 depicts this organization and delineates the target population for each intervention level. While primary prevention targets all staff, students, and settings, secondary and tertiary prevention focus on at-risk and high-risk students and are carried out in small groups or one-on-one.

![Figure 2.1: Continuum of School-Wide and Positive Behavior Support](image)

**Source:** OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Effective Schoolwide Interventions31

Primary interventions, those that occur at the whole school level, are necessary to move school culture away from punishment of problem behavior toward positive encouragement of desired behavior. At this level, uniformity is established among teachers and administrators in the language, practices, and reinforcements they use. Primary interventions are meant to “reduce the ‘white noise’ of common but constant student

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
disruption that distracts [educators] from focusing intervention expertise on the more serious problems..." 32 Secondary prevention targets at-risk students and focuses on reducing current cases of problem behavior. 33 Tertiary prevention is intended to reduce complications, intensity, and severity of problematic behavior using individualized intervention. 34 Figure 2.2 outlines implementation strategies for each of the three levels.

**Figure 2.2: SWPBIS Three Tiered Implementation: Core Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention Tier</th>
<th>Core Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Primary               | • Behavioral expectations defined  
                         | • Behavioral expectations taught  
                         | • Reward system for appropriate behavior  
                         | • Continuum of consequences for problem behavior  
                         | • Continuous collection and use of data for decision-making |
| Secondary (5-10% of students) | • Universal screening  
                         | • Progress monitoring for at-risk students  
                         | • System for increasing structure and predictability  
                         | • System for increasing contingent adult feedback  
                         | • System for linking academic and behavioral performance  
                         | • System for increasing home/school communication  
                         | • Collection and use of data for decision-making |
| Tertiary (1-5% of students) | • Functional Behavioral Assessment  
                         | • Team-based comprehensive assessment  
                         | • Linking of academic and behavior supports  
                         | • Individualized intervention based on assessment information focusing on (a) prevention of problem contexts, (b) instruction on functionally equivalent skills, and instruction on desired performance skills, (c) strategies for placing problem behavior on extinction, (d) strategies for enhancing contingency reward of desired behavior, and (e) use of negative or safety consequences if needed.  
                         | • Collection and use of data for decision-making |

Source: OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Effective Schoolwide Interventions 35

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**PROGRAM Efficacy**

Of all the alternative disciplinary strategies, the most research regarding efficacy has been conducted on SWPBIS. Research shows that this system is able to lower numbers of suspensions, office referrals, and observed problem behaviors.\(^{36}\) One study conducted in Maryland found that schools implementing SWPBIS with high fidelity had 35 percent fewer office referrals and significantly fewer suspensions compared to schools that were not using SWPBIS.\(^{37}\) A similar investigation found that state-wide implementation of SWPBIS in Maryland lowered suspension rates in elementary schools from 6.67 percent to 4.07 percent and in middle schools from 33.36 percent to 26.66 percent.\(^{38}\) Furthermore, a meta-analysis of single case studies found a decrease in office referrals and observed problem behaviors in schools that implemented SWPBIS.\(^{39}\)

First tier interventions can be effectively implemented by normal school personnel without additional funding, though more research is needed before similar claims are made for secondary and tertiary level prevention.\(^{40}\) Meta-analyses of SWPBIS implementation indicate potentially greater effects on discipline outcomes in urban settings than in rural or suburban schools. These studies also find that implementation is more difficult in high school environments than middle or elementary schools.\(^{41}\)

Research also indicates SWPBIS’s potential to positively impact academic achievement. A study conducted in an urban elementary school found increased student achievement, as measured by performance on standardized math and reading tests.\(^{42}\) Similarly, an investigation conducted in 428 Illinois schools indicates that SWPBIS implementation is correlated with improved social outcomes and math achievement.\(^{43}\) Another study, carried

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 10.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 10.


out in an urban middle school, found correlation between SWPBIS implementation and higher scores on standardized math and reading exams.⁴⁴

Though the School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports approach offers promising results for disciplinary and academic outcomes, less research has investigated its effect on racial and disability status disparities. The system’s goal is to create equitable discipline based on a system of positive reinforcement. However, it does not explicitly address racial disparities. Experts note SWPBIS’ capacity for minimizing racial discipline disparities if it:

- Creates multiple intervention points before suspension or expulsion,
- Provides mental health support for children dealing with trauma,
- Teaches behavioral expectations that might minimize cultural mismatch in the classroom, and
- Creates structured school environments with clear behavioral expectations.⁴⁵

But the same authorities caution:

...SWPBIS may improve school climate overall, but without addressing some of the other layered-causes of racial disproportionalty, such as the conscious or unconscious biases of school staff, racial climates of schools, or school leader perspectives on discipline, effective implementation of SWPBIS alone may not be enough to reduce racial disparities in suspensions.⁴⁶

Ultimately, the successful implementation of SWPBIS requires ongoing technical support, implementation of specific policies to address racial and disability biases in discipline, and a fundamental shift away from a punitive school culture.

**DENVER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Denver is home to 185 public schools that serve over 80,000 students. It is a racially diverse district: 58 percent of its student body is Hispanic and 15 percent is black, as indicated in Figure 2.3 on the following page. Therefore, Denver Public Schools acts as a useful example of an urban, racially diverse district that has successfully implemented School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, including provisions for rectifying racial disparities.

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⁴⁴ Lassen, S., M. Steele, and W. Sailor. “The Relationship of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support to Academic Achievement in an Urban Middle School.” Psychology in Schools, 43:6, July 2006. [http://pbi.sagepub.com/content/14/1/5.short](http://pbi.sagepub.com/content/14/1/5.short)


⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 11.
**Figure 2.3: Denver Public School District Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL TYPE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K – 8 Schools</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 12 Schools</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools (Traditional)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Schools</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>84,424</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Denver Public Schools

Following trends of racial disparities in suspensions, Denver Public Schools reevaluated its disciplinary model and, in August 2008, officially changed its policy to one of School-wide Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Though only eight schools were included for SWPBIS implementation at the outset of the transition in 2005, by the close of the 2010-2011 school year, 98 schools were implementing a SWPBIS program.

The district follows OSEP’s three-tiered approach to SWPBIS through implementation at the general, targeted, and intensive intervention levels. These are presented in Figure 2.4.

**Figure 2.4: Denver Public Schools SWPBIS Three Tiered Disciplinary Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THREE TIERS</th>
<th>Administrative/Legal</th>
<th>Restorative</th>
<th>Skill-Based/Therapeutic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Student Population (85 – 90%)</td>
<td>Reminders and redirection</td>
<td>Community service</td>
<td>Bully prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of privileges</td>
<td>Apologies (written/verbal)</td>
<td>Positive Behavior Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who Need Targeted Intervention (5 – 10%)</td>
<td>Administrative/Legal</td>
<td>Restorative</td>
<td>Skill-Based/Therapeutic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior intervention plan</td>
<td>Victim-offender dialog</td>
<td>Anger management group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-school suspension</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>School social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who Need Intensive Intervention (1 – 5%)</td>
<td>Administrative/Legal</td>
<td>Restorative</td>
<td>Skill-Based/Therapeutic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out-of-school suspension</td>
<td>Family/community group conference</td>
<td>Mental Health Corporation of Denver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referral to police department</td>
<td>Re-entry/transition conference</td>
<td>School-based health clinic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Denver Public Schools

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Schools utilize the School-wide Information System (SWIS) data collection system to track disciplinary patterns in the district. They record office disciplinary referrals (ODR’s) in the system and are able to track student behavior in order to put interventions in place and to track effectiveness of interventions. This data tracking shows ODR’s decline an average of 39 percent across Denver Public Schools from the 2007-2008 to the 2009-2010 school years, as depicted in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5: Denver Public Schools, Students with 3+ Major ODR’s, 2007-2009

![Graph showing decline in ODR's]

Source: Denver Public Schools

It also tracks a significant decrease in the number of out-of-school suspensions at schools that have been implementing SWPBIS for over three years, as presented in Figure 2.6 on the following page.

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52 Ibid., p. 12.
53 Ibid., p. 12.
Figure 2.6: Denver Public Schools, Out of School Suspensions, 2007-2009

Source: Denver Public Schools\(^5^4\)

In addition to behavioral gains, the following aspects of school life have improved:

- Student satisfaction with school safety and environment,
- Teacher retention, and
- Time saved through avoiding class interruptions and ODR’s.\(^5^5\)

Notably, Denver Public Schools targets racial and disability bias by explicitly opposing racism and other types of discrimination in its disciplinary policy. Figure 2.7, on the following page, presents excerpts of these policies. Efforts to redress racial disciplinary disparities also take the form of cultural sensitivity training for some teachers and staff. The district’s strategic plan lists “implement training and support strategies to promote the development of inclusive and culturally responsive school communities that embrace the diversity of our students and employees” as one strategy focus for 2010-2013.\(^5^6\) While there are competing theories regarding the efficacy of cultural competency, research suggests that combining SWPBIS with cultural competence training may improve the efficacy of SWPBIS.\(^5^7\)

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 12.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 12-14.


The student discipline policy “assures equity across racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, as well as other
protected classes (gender, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, and
gender identity).”

“The District serves a diverse community. In order to serve all students and to prepare them to be
members of an increasingly diverse community, school and staff must build cultural competence. We
must strive to eliminate any institutional racism and any other discrimination that presents barriers to
success.”

“Discipline procedures must guarantee due process to all students and must be enforced uniformly, fairly,
consistently and in a manner that does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, race, color, religion,
national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability.”

“This policy and accompanying procedures are intended to help the District eliminate racial and ethnic
disparities, and any other protected class disparities, in school discipline, while improving behavior, school
climate, and academic achievement for all students.”

“A copy of this policy and accompanying procedures shall be readily available in each school’s
administration office, in both Spanish and English. Copies of this policy, its accompanying procedures/
regulations, and school rules will be made available, upon request, to each student and parent/guardian,
and, upon request, promptly translated in a language that the parent/guardian can understand.”

School district staff responsible for implementing this Policy shall do so without
discrimination based on ethnicity, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual
orientation, age, or disability.”

“Efforts shall be made to eliminate any racial disparities in school discipline. Staff members are
specifically charged with monitoring the impact of their actions on students from racial and ethnic groups
or other protected classes that have historically been over-represented among those students who are
suspended, expelled, or referred to law enforcement.”

Source: Denver Public Schools

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice (RJ) programs have been implemented in several school districts across
the nation in response to dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to discipline. RJ
advocates point out that retributive justice measures may alienate the offender from the
school environment and may increase the likelihood of further delinquency. Instead, RJ
focuses on repairing the bond between victim and perpetrator and incorporating the
perpetrator back into the school community. Essentially,

The approach now taking root in 21 Oakland schools, and in Chicago, Denver and
Portland, Ore., tries to nip problems and violence in the bud by forging closer,
franker relationships among students, teachers and administrators. It encourages

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db=policy.fp3&format=detail.html&lay=policyview&recid=32883&findall=
60 “Policy JK-R – Student Conduct and Discipline Procedures.” Parent Handbook. Denver Public Schools
sortfield=Title&studentparent=1&PolicyID=E_JK-R&find=
young people to come up with meaningful reparations for their wrongdoing while challenging them to develop empathy for one another through ‘talking circles’ ....

A Restorative Justice system provides an opportunity to “get to the source” of problematic or aggressive behavior that traditional disciplinary methods do not. It also emphasizes inclusion and community healing as opposed to exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspension).

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

There is no standard model of Restorative Justice implementation, instead each school is meant to tailor the approach to their specific context. However, there are several underlying philosophies that should inform implementation. Some of the key characteristics of Restorative Justice include:  

- Focusing on the harms of the incident instead of the broken rule,
- Understanding that these harms create responsibilities for the offender to remedy to the best of their ability,
- Re-establishing broken relationships,
- Showing equal concern for the welfare of the victim and the offender,
- Using inclusive processes based on consensus, and
- Respecting all parties in the process of addressing and remedying harms.

A vital component of Restorative Justice is involving both the offender and the victim in generating solutions to repair inflicted damage. It focuses on both the process (bringing community together, prompting dialog, analyzing root of problem, exploring emotions, and repairing bond between victim and perpetrator) and the desired outcome (repair of harm). In this way, students develop empathy, accountability, and responsibility. It is important to note that proponents of Restorative Justice recognize the place of traditional school discipline models. Positive behavioral interventions and traditional discipline are appropriate accompaniments to the RJ model for learners who do not comply with RJ methods.

In terms of concrete practices, there are several hallmarks of the Restorative Justice system that are commonly found in schools utilizing this approach. The main tools, presented in

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Figure 2.8, are victim-offender mediation, circles, and peer mediation. Each is a technique used with the ultimate goal of healing victim, offender, and community. RJ principles may also be incorporated into school curricula or may be delivered in communication training modules (e.g. conflict resolution, anger management, communication skills).66

**Figure 2.8: Common Restorative Justice Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRACTICE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim-Offender Mediation</td>
<td>The process where the victim of the breach of the school rules and the offender come together in a meeting for a dialogue with the help of a trained mediator. In the meeting, the victim shares their story of victimization with the offender and learns more about the circumstances surrounding the rule breach as the offender offers their account of the event and takes responsibility for their actions. Frequently a restitution plan to reestablish relationships and make amends for the normative breach will result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circles</td>
<td>This is a process whereby a sub-community in the school (a group of students, a group of teachers and students, or any other school grouping) sits in a circle. This circle of people passes a talking piece around (often something of meaning to the group like a teddy bear for elementary school students). The possessor of the talking piece is the only one permitted to talk and the others in the group are to listen to their narrative. Circles have proven to have a wide variety of applications in schools. Originally used in much the same way as victim-offender mediation or conferencing (as a disciplinary measure), circles have been innovated to create community in a classroom, reintegrate offenders into their school setting, to discuss academic concerns, or to accomplish any number of other group tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Mediation</td>
<td>In this process a cadre of mediators is trained from amongst the student body. These mediators then offer to intervene in conflicts at school by facilitating a meeting between the parties in conflict. Here there may or may not be a clear offender as with victim-offender mediation. This practice is not exclusive to Restorative Justice programs but is highly compatible with its tenets and is considered to be a part of many RJ programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking67

The success of Restorative Justice techniques applied to student discipline depends on implementation by a skilled RJ coordinator. This person must understand and respect the adolescents and communities that they work with in order to be effective. A successful RJ practitioner:68

- Needs to understand adolescents and the issues that affect them.
- Should not think that the best way to interact with adolescents is to pretend to be one of them.
- Should show empathy, maturity, and professionalism while handling the sometimes awkward exchanges of adolescents.

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66 Ibid., p. 2.
- Conduct[s] focused discussions that do not pander to the students, while still being interesting enough to keep the students engaged.
- Know[s] how to respond to unplanned, difficult topics such as death, while creating an environment in which students [feel] safe in self-disclosure.
- Must understand the community in which they are working.
- Must be consistent in their use of restorative principles.

Well-equipped RJ leaders have the potential to affect positive change in a school community. However, assigning poorly trained personnel to the task may have little effect negotiating conflict or may even inflict more harm than good.

Experts suggest that school culture must also change in order for Restorative Justice measures to be effective. Because this model reflects a fundamentally different approach to discipline, emphasizing inclusion and healing over exclusion and punishment, schools that simply adopt Restorative Justice practices without re-training staff members may not notice any improvement in discipline. In this vein, the literature emphasizes the importance of school culture in RJ efficacy:

Restorative Justice represents a different vision of staff-student relationships – one in which teachers and students are more equal members of the community. This research suggests that Restorative Justice principles will likely be more successfully implemented in schools with these existing values or where staff members are committed to building these relationships with students.  

School commitment to RJ practices may directly determine the level of success they achieve. Therefore, several districts using RJ disciplinary approaches partner with a local nonprofit organization for training and support.

**Program Efficacy**

Relatively little research has been conducted to investigate the efficacy of Restorative Justice disciplinary systems in schools. However, early research on the subject indicates several areas of success. Case studies show a drop in police calls, office disciplinary referrals, and suspension. These results seem to correlate with the level of commitment to RJ that school staff display, indicating that the system is most impactful in settings where teachers and administrators are highly committed to the program and school-wide awareness of the program is high.

One case study conducted in an Oakland middle school found that integration of RJ principles and practices into “the culture, norms, and values of the school, along with strong committed leadership and a multi-year partnership with a

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local non-profit Restorative Justice organization” resulted in an 87 percent decrease in suspensions and zero expulsions. It is important to remember the limitations of this research. Most studies are conducted with limited sample sizes and without standardized measurement tools to evaluate RJ programs (due to their varied nature from school to school) so comparison groups are difficult to establish.

Similarly, there is a lack of research regarding Restorative Justice’s applications to racial biases in discipline. Several hallmarks of the approach, though, are linked in other studies to lowering racial gaps in discipline. For instance, RJ emphasized creating a safe space for students to share their emotions and let their guards down. It promotes caring relationships among students and staff and seeks to strengthen schools culture. Successful implementation of each of these goals is associated with lower suspension rates and smaller racial disparities in discipline. However, the dedication necessary for successful RJ implementation may mean that schools with high racial gaps in discipline may not initially be equipped to successfully implement Restorative Justice.

**Oakland Unified School District**

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) provides an excellent example of successful school-wide application of Restorative Justice in an urban and highly diverse setting. The district is comprised of 87 total schools and serves over 36,000 students, as indicated in Figure 2.9 below.

**Figure 2.9: Oakland Unified School District Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL TYPE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools (K – 5)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary/Middle Schools (K – 8)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools (6 – 8)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High Schools (6 – 12)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools (9 – 12)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative/Continuation Schools</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Schools*</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td>36,180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OUSD

*Excluding District-authorized charter schools

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http://eblacxcu.net/portal/archive/files/aber_7035e7bc13.pdf

According to the district’s website, over 30 percent of students are African American, but this demographic has the following statistics:76

- 67 percent of the referrals for out of school suspension,
- 50 percent of the referrals for expulsion, and
- 40 percent of OUSD African American students do not graduate from high school.

Since 2005, 66 percent of OUSD students who dropped out have had contact with the criminal justice system. As a result, the district launched a school-wide Restorative Justice Initiative in 2009 “to lower our rate of suspension and expulsion and to foster positive school climates with the goal of eliminating racially disproportionate discipline practices and the resulting push-out of students into the prison pipeline.”77 This initiative is being implemented at 19 sites across the district and is supported through a partnership with Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), a local nonprofit.78 The district is also home to eight additional Peer Restorative Justice sites, at which “a representative group of youth are selected and trained in restorative practices.”79

The implementation sites in OUSD use four methods of Restorative Justice in their schools including: circles, restorative conversations, family and community group conferences, and mediation.80 These methods are applied across three tiers of intervention, as presented in Figure 2.10 on the following page.

According to the OUSD model, parameters for each tier intervention are as follows:81

- **Tier 1** – The use of classroom circles to build relationships, create shared values and guidelines, and promote restorative conversations following behavioral disruption. The goal is to build a caring, intentional, and equitable community with conditions conducive to learning.

- **Tier 2** – The use of restorative processes such as harm circles, mediation, or family-group conferencing to respond to disciplinary issues in a restorative manner. This process addresses the root causes of the harm, supports accountability for the offender, and promotes healing for the victim(s), the offender, and the school community.

- **Tier 3** – Support the successful re-entry of youth following suspension, truancy, expulsion or incarceration. The goal is to welcome youth to the school community in

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77 Ibid.
a manner that provides wraparound support and promotes student accountability and achievement.

Figure 2.10: Three Tiers of School-Based Restorative Justice

![Diagram of Three Tiers of School-Based Restorative Justice]

Source: OUSD

In addition to implementing Restorative Justice at these three levels, schools also integrate Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into the classroom and non-classroom environments. Two sites, Bunche Continuation School and West Oakland Middle School, partner with Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth to implement whole school Restorative Justice. As a next step, the district cites “a comprehensive evaluation of RJ sites” as a means to analyze program efficacy and direct future improvements.

The Restorative Justice Initiative in the Oakland Unified School District has garnered significant media attention due to its various successes. The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, and East Bay Express all produced articles citing reductions in disciplinary infractions at multiple OUSD schools as a result of Restorative Justice programs. Though a

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82 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
comprehensive review of the program has not been conducted – one is planned for the 2013-2014 school year – statistics from several schools indicate various successes. For instance, suspensions dropped by 51 percent after RJ implementation in Bunche Continuation School in the 2011-2012 school year, and 19 OUSD schools received awards for reducing overall suspensions and reducing suspensions of African American males by at least 20 percent.\(^8^6\)

The most extensive study of Restorative Justice’s impact is the one conducted in West Oakland’s Cole Middle School. This investigation cites reductions in disciplinary actions and improvements in student knowledge and perception of RJ programs. As Figure 2.11 and Figure 2.12 depict, both suspension and expulsion rates declined dramatically after the implementation of Restorative Justice at Cole Middle School in 2007. **Suspension rates decreased by 87 percent and expulsions fell to zero in one year’s time,** though suspensions climbed somewhat the following year.\(^8^7\)

![Figure 2.11: Suspension Rates (per 100 students) at Cole Middle School](image)

Source: Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice\(^8^8\)

\(^8^8\) Ibid.

http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/a-people-focused-solution/Content?oid=3555075
In addition to reducing suspension and expulsion, students reported that Restorative Justice was helping at their school (83 percent), was reducing fighting (83 percent), was helping relationships with other students (91 percent), and was helping relationships with teachers (70 percent). Further studies need to be conducted before conclusions can be drawn about the success of Restorative Justice at the other OUSD implementation sites.

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs have roots in child development research and seek to prepare children “with the life-long skills necessary to become responsible, socially skilled, and caring citizens.” Research indicates that some version of SEL is implemented at 59 percent of American schools. This strategy involves teaching the following skills (and/or related skills) within the classroom:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision making

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p. 20.
92 Ibid., p. 16. Though it is difficult to ascertain how many of these programs are informed by SEL best practice research.
93 Ibid., p. 14.
These lessons are supported by establishing strong pupil-teacher bonds and promoting student self-discipline. By focusing on these goals, SEL instruction provides “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.”

SEL focuses on reducing in-school disciplinary problems and preparing students for life after school. Thus,

By learning to identify the emotions that they and others are feeling, communicate about those emotions, regulate how they express or respond to emotions, and empathize with others, children gain ways of coping with life that promote healthy life-long pro-social behaviors.

**Program Description**

Social and Emotional Learning is a program that teaches students the intra-personal skills necessary for healthy behavior and emotional expression in students. Core competencies in the areas of emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulations are taught in class, integrated into the curriculum, and demonstrated through teacher instructional practices. The core competencies are depicted in Figure 2.13.

![Figure 2.13: SEL Core Competencies](source: CASEL)

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The definitions and applications of each core competency are:\(^{97}\)

- **Self-awareness** – The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

- **Self-management** – The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

- **Social awareness** – The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- **Relationship skills** – The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

- **Responsible decision making** – The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

These skills are explicitly taught in the classroom and are integrated into expectations for student-teacher and student-student interactions. Outside of the classroom, program implementation also includes school-wide community building activities, home-school integration, class meetings, and service learning.\(^{98}\) Figure 2.14 depicts the actions and outcomes associated with successful SEL implementation.

**Figure 2.14: SEL Approaches and Outcomes**

Source: CASEL\(^{99}\)

\(^{97}\) Ibid.


Experts emphasize the importance of integrating SEL education fully into school curricula and culture. The successful implementation of SEL requires that programs be applied to classroom and non-classroom settings “in ways that are meaningful, sustained, and embedded in the day-to-day interactions of students, educators, and school staff.” Thus, schools should not restrict SEL education to isolated weekly lessons but should extend teaching and skill building opportunities throughout the school. Experts note that “because social and emotional skills develop across contexts, SEL efforts should also be horizontally aligned – that is, intentionally connected and consistent across micro-contexts within schools (e.g., classrooms, playgrounds, lunchrooms).”

School and teacher support for SEL programs is essential for their success. This factor is particularly important for Social and Emotional Learning because the program is implemented primarily through classroom curricula and teacher relationships with students. For programs to be implemented with high fidelity and have a significant impact on student behavior and achievement, commitment from teachers is vital. Similarly, school culture, which sets the tone for student and teacher interactions, must support and promote the strong student-teacher bond which is so essential to SEL success.

**PROGRAM EFFICACY**

Social and Emotional Learning programs claim to reduce behavioral problems and improve academic achievement in students, and a large body of evidence supports this assertion. The literature suggests that “an incredible wealth of research links SEL programs to decreased truancy, less drug use, lower dropout rates, improved academic performance, improved connection to school, and fewer behavioral problems.” A recent meta-analysis of 213 SEL-related studies impacting upwards of 270,000 learners and spanning 50 years summarizes findings in this arena. The synthesis notes a correlation between high quality, high fidelity application of SEL with:

- Improvements in students’ social and emotional skills
- Improvements in students’ attitudes towards themselves and others

In a smaller subset of the studies, SEL implementation correlates with:

- Decreased behavioral problems
- 11 percentile improvement in academic performance

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101 Ibid., p. 8.
Importantly, the study also demonstrates that SEL can be implemented effectively by normal school staff without the supervision or support of outside experts. The most critical factors in the success of SEL programs, according to the meta-analysis, are:

- [Making] sure activities are sequenced to support skill development,
- [Employing] active learning strategies to teach new skills,
- [Having] at least one component dedicated to developing personal or social skills, and
- Explicitly [teaching] SEL skills rather than more general concepts related to positive development

There is no research specifically addressing Social and Emotional Learning’s impact on racial disparities in disciplinary infractions. However, SEL strategies may be effective in lowering the racial gap if they focus on improving academic outcomes for students of color and building strong relationships between teachers and students of color. Without this emphasis, “untargeted race-blind solutions may leave unaddressed other causes of the racial discipline gap, namely – the trauma inflicted on children growing up in areas of concentrated poverty, teacher bias, and poor racial climates…”

Cleveland Metropolitan School District

The Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) serves a large urban center and a student population that is composed of over 80 percent minority students, as depicted in Figure 2.15 on the next page. Following a shooting in 2007 at one of the district’s high schools, CMSD implemented Social and Emotional Learning programs as part of its Human Ware Initiative meant to prevent future violence. While SEL approaches are incorporated into disciplinary policy at all levels of education in the district, the most systemic implementation is through the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program in elementary schools. PATHS is an evidence-based SEL program which delivers skill training through a set of short lessons.

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106 Ibid.
108 Ibid., p. 16.
Figure 2.15: Cleveland Metropolitan School District Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL TYPE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K – 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Black, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>K – 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K – 8/K – 8</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Schools</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td>40,251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CMSD

The PATHS program is delivered in 72 CMSD Pre-K – 8 schools, with specific emphasis placed on instruction in grades 6 – 8. Instruction is delivered in 20–30 minute lessons about three times per week throughout the school year. Successful implementation moves behavior lessons beyond the classroom into the larger school environment. The district’s website highlights several skill groups that students acquire through the PATHS program, including: friendship skills, emotional skills, self-control skills, and problem-solving skills. These are established through three instructional units, presented in Figure 2.16 on the following page. At a high level,

Skill concepts are typically presented via direct instruction, discussion, modeling stories, or video presentations. Discussion and role-playing activities follow, giving children a change to practice the skill and teachers a chance to monitor the level of understanding and skill attained by each class.

The PATHS program includes a period of training for teachers to become accustomed to the new materials and delivery format. Educators participate in an initial day of training at the outset of the program and then implement PATHS in their classrooms for a period of six to eight weeks. After that time, they attend a supplemental day of training to discuss successes and strategies for implementation. Seven PATHS coaches were hired at the outset of implementation to assist teachers and administrators with any issues that arose.

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111 Ibid.
### Figure 2.16: PATHS Curriculum Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The Self-Control Unit (Turtle) | - Unit 1 focuses on introducing the PATHS® Curriculum and on helping children gain better self-control.  
- This Unit is not necessary for all children, but for those who need it, it is often a prerequisite for being able to attend to the remainder of the curriculum.  
- Teachers or staff would use this Unit with children who show significant language and/or cognitive delays or in small classes of children with severe behavior problems.  
- In Unit 1, students learn self-control through the use of the Turtle Technique.  
- The Turtle Technique consists of a series of structured lessons accompanied by a reinforcement program that is individually tailored by each classroom teacher. This technique is unique both because it teaches self-control in interpersonal rather than in academic/cognitive domains, and because it includes a system for generalization throughout the day.  
- Through a series of lessons, children are told a metaphorical story about a young turtle that has both interpersonal and academic difficulties that arise because s/he does "not stop to think." These problems are manifest in the young turtle's aggressive behaviors (which are related to numerous uncomfortable feelings). With the assistance of a "wise old turtle," the young turtle learns to develop better self-control (which involves going into his/her shell).  
- The script for the Turtle Story is accompanied by 8 drawings which illustrate each section of the story. The original Turtle Technique model has been extensively redesigned within the PATHS® Curriculum. |
| Feelings and Relationships | - The second section, Feelings and Relationships, consists of lessons related to emotional and interpersonal understanding.  
- The lessons cover approximately 50 different affective states and are taught in a developmental hierarchy beginning with basic emotions (happy, sad, angry, etc.) and later introducing more complex emotional states (jealousy, guilt, pride).  
- Further, the children are also taught cues for the self-recognition of their own feelings and the recognition of emotions in others, affective self-monitoring techniques, training in attributions that link causes and emotions, perspective-taking skills in how and why to consider another's point-of-view, empathic realization of how one's behavior can affect other people, and information regarding how the behavior of others can affect oneself. These lessons include group discussions, role-playing skits, art activities, stories, and educational games.  
- An important sub-unit of the Feelings Section is concerned with Anger Management. In this section, affects such as anger and frustration are discussed, differentiations are made between feelings (all feelings are OK to have) and behaviors (some are OK and some are NOT OK), and modeling and role-play are utilized to teach children new ways to recognize and control anger.  
- Another method for helping children to calm down and learn better self-control is also introduced in this sub-unit, which is called the Control Signals Poster (CSP). The CSP is modeled on the notion of a traffic signal and is a revised version of the Stop Light used in the *Yale-New Haven Middle School Social Problem Solving Program* (Weissberg, Caplan, & Benetto, 1988). |
### UNIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERPERSONAL COGNITIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- The third section of the curriculum teaches interpersonal problem-solving. The skills in the preceding domains are all prerequisites for learning competent interpersonal problem-solving, so lessons on this topic do not begin until the groundwork has been covered by previous instruction.
- Following the conceptual model developed by D’Zurilla and Goldfried (1971), Shure and Spivak (1978), and Weissberg et al. (1981), this content area has been expanded to sequentially cover the following:
  - STOP - WHAT IS HAPPENING?
    1. Stopping and thinking
    2. Problem identification
    3. Feeling identification
  - GET READY - WHAT COULD I DO?
    4. Deciding on a goal
    5. Generating alternative solutions
    6. Evaluating the possible consequences of these solutions
    7. Selecting the best solution
    8. Planning the best solution
  - GO! - TRY MY BEST PLAN
    9. Trying the formulated plan
  - EVALUATE - HOW DID I DO?
    10. Evaluating the outcome
    11. Trying another solution and/or plan, or alternatively reevaluating the goal, if an obstacle results in failure to reach the intended goal

Source: The Prevention Research Center

CMSD partners with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) for support implementing SEL programming and with American Institutes for Research (AIR) for support measuring the impact of intervention. CASEL consults with the district, providing it “technical assistance, coaching and training to district administrators and school leaders on planning, implementation, standards and assessment, and communication.” Similarly, AIR provides CMSD support with implementation and evaluation of the Human Ware Initiative, including specifically the PATHS program.

In 2013, two years after the outset of implementation, AIR conducted an evaluation of the CMSD’s PATHS program with promising results. The study finds moderate fidelity to the program in school teachers, as evidenced by principal reporting of implementation at their schools. Figure 2.17 on the following page displays school principal responses to questions

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115 “SEL is Invaluable to Improving Behavior and Safety.” CASEL. http://www.casel.org/snapshots/cleveland-metropolitan-school-district
regarding implementation. They indicate that the majority of teachers at participating schools are trained in the PATHS curriculum and that close to 50 percent of teachers are teaching PATHS lessons.

**Figure 2.17: Cleveland Metropolitan School District, PATHS Evaluation, Pre-K – 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>Blank</th>
<th>Partial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Are all classroom teachers at your school trained in PATHS?&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Are all teachers at your school teaching PATHS lessons?&quot;</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Institutes of Research

**Using statistical analysis of classroom data, the report notes several improvements in student behavior and perceptions as a result of PATHS implementation.** During the first two years of implementation, teachers reported ratings of student attention, aggression, and social competence. Classrooms where PATHS was implemented experienced improved social competence and attention scores during the first year. Aggression remained relatively stable over the first year of implementation.

In both years, higher teacher rating of the PATHS program correlated with increased attention and social and emotional competence in students. During the second year of implementation, PATHS classrooms exhibited student gains in social and emotional competence and attention. However, they also experienced increased aggression scores from the fall to the spring.

As PATHS implementation increased from year one to year two, student-reported conditions for learning (e.g. challenge, support, peer social and emotional climate, school safety) improved. This indicates that schools with better PATHS implementation also have better school climates.

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118 Ibid., p. 27-28.
119 Ibid., p. 30.
120 Ibid., p. 29.
121 Ibid., p. 37.
SECTION III: TARGETED DISCIPLINARY INTERVENTIONS

Aside from school-wide approaches to disciplinary policy, several targeted intervention models can be used to improve student behavior and reduce the use of suspension. The What Works Clearinghouse\textsuperscript{122} and the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices\textsuperscript{123} review research conducted on specific intervention strategies and rate each intervention by the quality of the research available and its implications for program efficacy. These two databases are useful tools for identifying evidence-based practices.

The following section presents interventions chosen from these two databases for their ability to positively impact student discipline. Once again, they are not systemic alternatives to suspension but rather meant to be embedded within a school-wide discipline policy. Though interventions often apply to multiple levels of education, they are presented here at three levels, elementary, middle, and high school.

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS

At the elementary and middle school levels, most disciplinary interventions focus on building social and emotional skills—either for entire class or for children exhibiting behavioral problems. The most effective programs are presented in Figure 3.1 on the following page. Generally, featured programs emphasize preventative measures rather than responses to serious behavioral disorders. They are meant to intervene at the early stages of behavioral development to prevent worsening problems in the future. Programs also target potentially difficult periods, such as the move from elementary school to middle school, in an effort to equip students with the skills necessary for a smooth transition. The effects of these programs on students range from improving external and emotional behavior to increasing academic achievement.

HIGH SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS

High school programs tend to emphasize intervention in acute disciplinary cases as opposed to school-wide prevention. Though some interventions outlined in Figure 3.2 may be applied to elementary or middle school students, their utility and the research to support them are strongest at the high school level. The programs teach students who exhibit problem behaviors alternative ways to deal with their anger, resolve conflict, and develop a sense of social responsibility. The results of these interventions tend to be a reduced number of disciplinary infractions and suspensions as well as improved academic outcomes.


\textsuperscript{123} National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/
### Figure 3.1: Evidence-Based Disciplinary Interventions, Elementary and Middle School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades/Ages</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Early Risers**<sup>124</sup> | Multi-year prevention program aimed at children exhibiting aggressive and disruptive behavior  
Includes child- and parent-focused components  
Child component teaches social and emotional skills and creates an individualized plan to address identified difficulties child faces in classroom  
Parent component teaches school involvement, discipline, and relationship building skills and creates an individualized plan to insure child is effectively supported at home | Potentially positive effects on social outcomes  
Potentially positive effects on academic performance  
No discernible effect on external behavior  
No discernible effect on emotional/internal behavior |
| Grades K – 5 |  
Training program for children, parents, and teachers that can be delivered to children with behavioral problems or entire class  
20–30 minute lessons focused on social and emotional skills delivered two to three times per week  
Lessons reinforced by group activities, practicing skills during the day, and parent involvement  
Parent training focuses on positive discipline and school involvement | Potentially positive effects on external behavior  
Potentially positive effects on social outcomes |
| **The Incredible Years**<sup>125</sup> |  
Training program for children and parents focused on the skills necessary for a successful transition to middle school  
Child component consists of group and individual sessions focused on goal setting, anger management, and problem solving  
Parent component consists of group and individual sessions aimed at skills needed to support child’s transition | Positive effects on external behavior  
Potentially positive effects on social outcomes |
| Grades 4 – 5 |  |  |

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<sup>124</sup> “Early Risers.” What Works Clearinghouse, June 2012.  

<sup>125</sup> “The Incredible Years.” What Works Clearinghouse, November 2011.  

<sup>126</sup> “Coping Power.” What Works Clearinghouse, October 2011.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADES/AGES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EFFICACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring School Community</strong>&lt;sup&gt;127&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Multi-year school program aimed at promoting core values, pro-social behavior, and a sense of school-wide community</td>
<td><em>Potentially positive</em> effects on behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades K – 6</td>
<td>Includes class lessons, cross-age “buddies” program, home activities, and school-wide community building</td>
<td>No discernible effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No discernible effects on academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Too Good for Violence</strong>&lt;sup&gt;128&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Program teaches social and emotional skills in elementary and middle school students</td>
<td><em>Potentially positive</em> effects on behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades K – 8</td>
<td>Lessons utilize role-playing, group activities, classroom discussion, and games</td>
<td><em>Potentially positive</em> effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Action</strong>&lt;sup&gt;129&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Promotes character development, social and emotional skills, and academic achievement to minimize problem behavior</td>
<td><em>Positive</em> effects on behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades K – 12</td>
<td>Each grade covers six units which utilize classroom discussion, role-play, and games</td>
<td><em>Positive</em> effects on academic achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: What Works Clearinghouse

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### Figure 3.2: Evidence-Based Disciplinary Interventions, High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades/Ages</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 6 – 10</td>
<td>An interactive software program designed to enhance students’ social and emotional skills as a means to improve academic achievement and prevent disciplinary infractions</td>
<td>Strong evidence support for program’s impact on students’ school achievement and empathy and problem solving skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consists of tutorials which employ a variety of instructional mediums including video, case studies, and quizzes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines</strong></td>
<td>School-based program meant to assist administrators, mental health staff, and law enforcement officers assess and attend to threat incidents from students and prevent student violence and unnecessary suspensions</td>
<td>Strong evidence support for program’s impact on lowering number of suspensions and expulsions and number of bullying infractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K – 12</td>
<td>School threat assessment team prevents violence by taking immediate action in severe cases, resolving student conflicts underlying threatening behavior, and developing intervention plans for students involved in threat incidents</td>
<td>Strong evidence support for program’s impact on increased access to mental health counselling for students who made threats of violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wyman’s Teen Outreach Program</strong></td>
<td>Program focuses on reducing teen pregnancy, course failure, and academic suspension</td>
<td>Moderate evidence support for program’s impact on decreased teen pregnancy, academic suspension, and course failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 6 – 12</td>
<td>Delivered over nine months to students either in school or after school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combines supervised volunteer service and weekly classroom sessions meant to empower teens through their help-giving role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices

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