



Moving towards Restorative Justice one step at a time:

Creating an Effective In-School Suspension Program

An effective In-School Suspension program for non-violent offences will provide students with tools to succeed academically and socially

However, there are significant educational consequences to high out-of-school suspension rate. Academic research shows that being suspended from school significantly increases the likelihood of subsequent suspension or expulsion.¹ In fact, we see this in our schools where in 2008-09 17,126 suspensions were given to 8042 students, a fact that indicates that some students were suspended multiple times.

Buffalo Public Schools graduate less than 50% (47%) of students attending. In addition, about a third of students drop out (32%).

“Students who receive a suspension in middle or high school are also significantly less likely to graduate on time and are more likely to drop out.”²

“Students who were suspended and/or expelled, particularly those who were repeatedly disciplined, were more likely to be held back a grade or to drop out than were students not involved in the disciplinary system.”³

Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) have an average suspension rate of 1 in 5 students, whereas the NYS average suspension rate is 1 in 20.

Table 1. Buffalo Public Schools Out-Of-School Suspension Rate

| | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Percent of Students Suspended | 15% | 25% | 19% |
| Number of Students Suspended | 4984 | 8042 | 6635 |

Data Source: NYSED.

¹ Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How Can We Improve School Discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 48-58.

² Balfanz, R., & Boccanfuso, C. (2007). *Falling off the Path to Graduation: Middle Grade Indicators in Boston*. Baltimore, MD: Everyone Graduates Center cited in Boccanfuso, C.& Kuhfeld, M (2011). *Multiple Responses Promising Results: Evidence-based, non-punitive alternatives to zero tolerance*. Child Trends

³ Fabelo, et al. (2011). *Breaking Schools’ Rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students’ success and juvenile justice involvement*. The Council of States Justice Center & Public Policy Research Institute.

The facts speak for themselves. While the high rate of suspension is not be the sole reason for the low graduation and high dropout rate, reducing suspensions will increase graduation and decrease dropout.

Table 2. Graduation and Drop-Out Rate for 2009-10

| | Graduated in 2010 | Dropped out 2010 |
|--------------|-------------------|------------------|
| All Students | 47% | 32% |
| Black | 45% | 31% |
| Hispanic | 40% | 41% |
| White | 58% | 26% |

Data Source: NYSED.

School suspension policies have a disparate impact on African American students. While Black students constitute 56% of the student body they are 71% of the students that are suspended. This report does not examine the cause for this disparity, but it important that as a community we recognize and acknowledge this fact.

Table 3. Number of Students Suspended

| | 2007-08 | | | 2008-09 | | | 2009-10 | | |
|----------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Number of students suspended | Percent of students suspended | Percent of Enrollment | Number of students suspended | Percent of students suspended | Percent of Enrollment | Number of students suspended | Percent of students suspended | Percent of Enrollment |
| Black | 3455 | 69% | 57% | 5705 | 71% | 57% | 4716 | 71% | 56% |
| Hispanic | 682 | 14% | 15% | 1111 | 14% | 15% | 945 | 14% | 15% |
| White | 735 | 15% | 25% | 1058 | 13% | 24% | 817 | 12% | 23% |
| Total | 4984 | | | 8042 | | | 6635 | | |

Data Source: NYSED.

Every administrator’s and teacher’s goal is to keep students safe in school so they can learn. As parents and community members we understand and respect that fact. In fact, we believe that for the safety of other students and school staff, students who commit violent offences should be removed from school premises.

Out-of-school suspensions for NON-VIOLENT offenses do not address the underlying issues that lead students to misbehave and are not essential to safety. Instead, students are often more likely to engage in unproductive behaviors which perpetuate the cycle of suspension.

In addition, there real problems with the current suspension policy in the BPS. First, not requiring a parent or guardian present when a student gets an out-of-school suspension can potentially endanger a student or allow him/her the opportunity to engage in more unproductive behavior. Second, the option of Alternative Instruction for two hours per day while a student is suspended does not provide enough educational time to the student and creates a practical problem for working parents. Third, out-of-school suspension pushes at-risk students out of the learning environment which perpetuates the problem, as students who are suspended are more likely to drop out or not graduate on time.⁴ In some cases the result is that suspended students are

⁴ See footnote two.

in the streets where they are more likely to come in contact with people engaged in illegal or dangerous activity or even engage in these themselves.

Often students are suspended from Buffalo schools for inappropriate attire, talking back to a teacher or wandering the halls. While all of these are legitimate school policies and aim at creating a learning environment free of distractions, students that engage in these behaviors –and other non-violent actions– should be disciplined in school and offered the appropriate services to overcome the reasons for misbehaving and the educational supports and opportunities they need to succeed.

BPS needs an effective In-School Suspension program that will be based on:

1. Mutual respect between teachers, school staff, students and their families.
2. Adequate resources, training and professional development for teachers and staff.
3. Understanding the students' reasons for engaging in negative behaviors and providing academic, emotional and behavioral support necessary.⁵

There are many examples of in-school suspension programs that are based on positive interventions and practices that help students realized the consequences of their actions in a productive manner.

A few good examples:

Falcon Middle School in Peyton Colorado: The school implemented an in-school-suspension program which included talking with the students about the reasons why they were under disciplinary action. That allowed the students to process the choices they made and help them learn. Students in the program also participate in daily community service which may include clean up littering from the school yard or helping with administrative functions. Safety and Discipline incidents dropped after starting program. In 2000-2001 there were 437 incidents. In 2001-2002 the school only had 74 incidents.

Denver, CO Public Schools: The district has implemented a tiered approach to discipline which includes an in-school suspension program. The program requires that the student has his/her homework package, a behavior intervention plan and removal from classroom. The district saw a 40% reduction in out of school suspensions.⁶

Palisades High School, Kintnersville, PA: The high school moved away from a punitive approach to student discipline to implement a positive program incorporating restorative practices and in-school suspension. The approach includes circle conversation, interventions, one-on-one and group discussions. The teachers received training on how to implement this approach and as a result disciplinary referrals, disruptive behavior and out-of-school suspension were steadily decreased over a three year period.⁷

⁵Hrabak, Mary & Settles, Doris.

Effective In School Suspension <http://www.kycss.org/pdfs-docs/clearpdf/issuesbriefs/iss.pdf>

⁶ http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy_JK-R_Attachment_A.pdf

⁷ International Institute of Restorative. (2009). Practices. *Improving School Climate: Findings from schools implementing restorative practices*

Appendix

Restorative Justice and Practices

The philosophy behind the Restorative Practices is that people respond, are happier and more productive, and are more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to or for them.⁸

Implementing restorative practices means moving from punishment to discipline that aims at restoring harm, having all stakeholders involved, as well as creating a more positive relationship that leads to treating the causes that led to the offence.

Bringing restorative practices in schools

Having restorative discipline in schools means having teachers and leaders in school that emphasize relationship building instead of rules and punishment. Research shows that students respond better and learn how to be responsible, as well as eventually develop the ability to control themselves and have self-discipline.⁹

Restorative practices promotes inclusiveness, relationship-building and problem-solving, through such restorative methods as circles for teaching and conflict resolution to conferences that bring victims, offenders and their supporters together to address wrongdoing. Instead of punishment, students are encouraged to reflect on and take responsibility for their actions and come up with plans to repair harm.¹⁰

Schools that have implemented practices within the restorative justice and discipline framework have seen disciplinary referrals drop, suspensions and expulsions dramatically decrease.¹¹

⁸Porter, A. (2007). *Restorative Justice in Schools: Research reveals power of restorative approach, part II*
http://www.safersanerschools.org/uploads/article_pdfs/schoolresearch2.pdf

⁹<http://www.restorativejustice.org/>

¹⁰<http://www.safersanerschools.org/articles.html?articleId=551>

¹¹ International Institute of Restorative Practices. (2009). *Improving School Climate: Findings from Schools Implementing Restorative Practices*. http://www.safersanerschools.org/uploads/news_pdfs/91666_IIRP-Improving-School-Climate.pdf