What are evidence based alternatives to suspension and expulsion?

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There are a number of evidence-based approaches to student behavior and school climate that are effective at supporting students in schools and addressing disruptive behavior. These approaches or programs are not mutually exclusive —in many schools, they are implemented as part of a holistic program.

Restorative Justice or Restorative Practices:

Restorative practices emphasize relationships, bringing all affected by an action to collaboratively address the needs and responsibilities of all involved, repair harm, and rebuild community. Schools use a variety of tools: restorative questions, affective statements, restorative circles, peer mediation, reflective exercises, victim/offender conferences, family conferencing.

Evidence it works:

Research shows that restorative justice practices in schools are more effective than traditionally punitive responses to issues like bullying or fighting and result in reduction of serious incidents. Additionally, restorative justice practices mitigate the racial and other minority disparities that result from traditional school discipline practices. Schools that implement restorative justice practices drastically reduce the use of harmful exclusionary practices like suspension and expulsion. The reduction in punitive practice tends to create more positive relationships between students and teachers and a better school environment overall. This typically leads to higher academic success, better attendance, and lower drop-out rates.[1]

School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions or Supports

School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Schools that implement PBIS explicitly teach shared behavior expectations and positively recognize students who meet those expectations. PBIS also uses data-based decision making and analysis, and increasing levels of supports for students with higher level behavior, emotional, and mental health needs.

Evidence it works:

Research has shown that the implementation of SWPBIS results in better student behavior and thus fewer disciplinary incidents and suspensions. This in turn leads to reports of better school climate and evidence of higher academic achievement and attendance rates.[2]

Social Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) specifically teaches students emotional and social skills in an academic setting. SEL programs teach social and self-awareness, decision making, self-management, and cooperation and communication in relationships.

Evidence it works:

Research has shown that SEL implementation leads to a reduction in problem behaviors like physical aggression and disruption. These in turn lead to an increase in academic achievement and graduation rates as well as a more positive attitude towards school.[3]

Trauma Informed Schools

Trauma Informed Schools seek to respond to students who have been exposed to trauma in a way that does not exacerbate their behavioral problems. Instead trauma informed schools offer resources such as classes on coping with stress, support groups, and more intensive services to address behavioral health needs. These reduce problem behaviors and emotional difficulties, removing the need for reactive or ineffective responses which can be particularly harmful to students who have experienced trauma. Trauma informed schools optimize positive and productive functioning for all students.

Evidence it works:

Research shows that trauma sensitive schools reduce violent incidents and discipline referrals from classrooms.[4] Case studies of trauma sensitive schools demonstrate that a trauma informed approach can result in massive decreases in suspension and expulsion rates. Other case studies have seen related rises in academic achievement and testing scores.[5]

Resources:

- National Center for Restorative Justice, **www.nationalcenterforrestorativejustice.com**. NCRJ as worked with schools throughout Washington to develop and implement restorative practices.
- Point One North, **www.pointonenorth.com**. Point One North facilitates peacemaking circles and conducts trainings on restorative justice throughout Washington.
- Dispute Resolution Centers, **http://resolutionwa.org/**. Many community mediation centers in Washington are trained in restorative practices and support schools.
- Schott Foundation with the NEA and AFT, **http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf**. A guide on employing restorative practices in the classroom.
- Dignity In Schools, **http://www.dignityinschools.org/content/positive-behavior-interventions-and-supports** Additional Resources and Information on PBIS.
- SEL for Washington, **http://www.selforwa.com/**. OSPI and other groups are developing guidelines and training for Washington State educators on SEL.
- 3DL Partnership, **http://depts.washington.edu/uw3dl/** A partnership between the UW school of social work and the college of education provides training and resources to schools and community partners on SEL.

- CASEL, **http://www.casel.org/guide/** Provides guides and toolkits for effective SEL programs at different age levels based on research.
- Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement (CLEAR), **http://ext100.wsu.edu/clear/** Consultants partner with schools in the promotion of trauma-informed practices in Washington State.
- Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, **http://www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/default.aspx** Provides training, guidance, and referral for schools looking to adopt a "Compassionate Schools Infrastructure".
- The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, **https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/download-a-free-copy-of-a-guide-to-creating-trauma-sensitive-schools/** Provides a downloadable guide to creating and advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools.

Endnotes

1   1 Fronius, Trevor, Hannah Persson, Sarah Guckenburg, Nancy Hurley, and Anthony Petrosino. *Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review.* Rep. West Ed Justice and Prevention Research Center, Feb. 2016. Web. <http://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ_Literature-Review_20160217.pdf>.

2   Vincent, Claudia G., Jeffrey R. Sprague, Michael Pavel, Tary J. Tobin, and Jeff M. Gau. "Chapter 14: Effectiveness of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in Reducing Racially Inequitable Disciplinary Exclusion." *Closing the School Discipline Gap.* Ed. Daniel J. Losen. N.p.: n.p., 2014. N. pag. Fix School Discipline. Web. <http://fixschooldiscipline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Vincent-Chapter-Chapter-14-of-Losen-Book.pdf>. (referencing studies which suggest that implementation of SWPBIS results in less school discipline incidents and higher academic success); Faer, Laura, and Sarah Omojola. Fix School Discipline: How We Can Fix School Discipline Toolkit. Rep. Public Counsel, n.d.: 7 Web. <http://nyspbis.org/RegionalForum1516/Guides%20and%20Workbooks/Fix%20School%20Discipline%20Toolkit%20for%20Educators.pdf>. (referencing studies which show SWPBIS resulting in lower discipline and referral rates and better school climate, student behavior, and academic achievement and attendance.)

3   Id. at 7 (referencing studies which show reduction in discipline referrals and problem behaviors in SEL schools as well as increases in academic and testing performances.)

4   4 Id. at 46-48

5   McInerney, Maura, and Amy McKlindon. *Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools.* Rep. Education Law Center, Dec. 2014.: 11 Web. <http://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf>.