

SDDFS Notes

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This issue of SDDFS Notes will examine the development of comprehensive, school-wide discipline plans. It employs selected materials from several sources, including nationally known experts. It also contains an example of an effort currently on-going in Florida, input from staff experiences, and a partial listing of resources where additional information on discipline plan development and refinement can be found.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS):

- D Nationwide, 4% of students had missed 1 or more days of school during the 30 days preceding the survey because they had felt unsafe, either at school or when traveling to or from school.
- D Nationwide, 14.8% of students had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the 12 months preceding the survey. Overall, male students (20%) were significantly more likely than female students (8.6%) to have been in a physical fight on school property. This significant difference
- D Approximately one third (32.9%) of students nationwide had property (car, clothing, or books) stolen or deliberately damaged on school property one or more times during the 12 months preceding the survey.

Information such as this clearly indicates that we must continue to develop and to refine our safe school plans, even though one has only to look at the statistical “Big Picture” to realize that schools are among the safest places our children can be. The challenge is how to keep them safe and make them safer.

We as educators, parents, and citizens want our children to be academically prepared to participate in the promises of the 21st century. We also know that children who are products of a positive support system of parents, peers, schools, and community make better learners and better citizens. To help assure this progression, we must continue to develop or enhance comprehensive, effective discipline plans.



Positive Behavioral Support for School-wide Discipline Plans



Prevention specialists and other educators know that the successful development and implementation of a comprehensive, proactive discipline plan depend upon the commitment and support from administration, faculty, non-instructional staff, the student body, parents, and other members of the community. Educational leaders should seriously seek input from each of these stakeholder groups.

George Sugai, of the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports at the University of Oregon, provides insight into developing and refining such school safety and discipline plans. He believes that each successful plan must possess at least seven elements, each of which is based on a team approach to positive support for the children within the school.

Proactive Approach to School-Wide Discipline

Schools that implement school-wide systems of positive behavior support focus on taking a team-based system approach for teaching appropriate behavior to all students in the school. Schools that have been successful in building school-wide systems develop procedures to accomplish the following:

- 1. Behavioral Expectations are Defined.** A small number of clearly defined behavioral expectations are defined. These often are simple, positively framed, rules, such as: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe; or Respect Yourself, Respect Others, and Respect Property.
- 2. Behavioral Expectations are Taught.** The behavioral expectations are taught to all students in the building, and are taught in real context. The goals of the teaching are to take broad expectations (like Be Respectful), and provide specific behavioral examples (In class, be respectful means raising your hand when you want to speak or get help. During lunch or in the hall, being respectful means using a person's name when you talk to him or her). "Teaching" appropriate behavior involves much more than simply telling students what behaviors they should avoid. Behavioral expectations are taught using the same teaching formats applied to other curricula. The general rule is presented, the rationale for the rule is discussed, positive examples ("right way") are described and rehearsed, and negative examples ("wrong way") are identified. Students are given an opportunity to practice the "right way" until they demonstrate fluent performance.
- 3. Appropriate Behaviors are Acknowledged.** Once appropriate behaviors have been defined and taught, they need to be acknowledged on a regular basis. Some schools do this through formal systems (tickets, rewards), while others do it through social events. Schools that are successful in creating a competent culture typically establish a pattern in which adult interactions with students are "positive" four times as often as they are "negative." To achieve this standard, some strategy is needed to build and maintain positive adult initiations to students (both in class and outside of class).
- 4. Behavioral Errors are Corrected Proactively.** When students violate behavioral expectations, clear procedures are needed for providing information to them that their behavior was unacceptable, and preventing that unacceptable behavior from resulting in inadvertent rewards. Students, teachers, and administrators all should be able to predict what will occur when behavioral errors are identified.
- 5. Program Evaluations and Adaptations are Made by a Team.** School-wide systems of behavior support involve ongoing modification and adaptation. Successful schools establish a simple, efficient strategy for continually assessing if they are being successful, and a decision-making process that allows adaptation to behavioral challenges. At the school-wide level, general measures of the school climate include behavior incident reports, attendance rates, tardies, detention and suspension rates, etc. When problem behaviors become more intense and frequent, functional assessment-based methods may need to be considered.
- 6. Administrative Support and Involvement are Active.** School-wide behavior support involves the active and ongoing support and involvement of key administrators.

- 7. Individual Student Support Systems are Integrated with School-wide Discipline Systems.** School-wide behavior support is a process for establishing a positive culture in a school. The procedures do not, however, replace the need to build and maintain a comprehensive set of procedures for supporting the smaller number of students who require more intense and durable behavioral support.

Schools that have been successful in implementing school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports describe the following benefits:

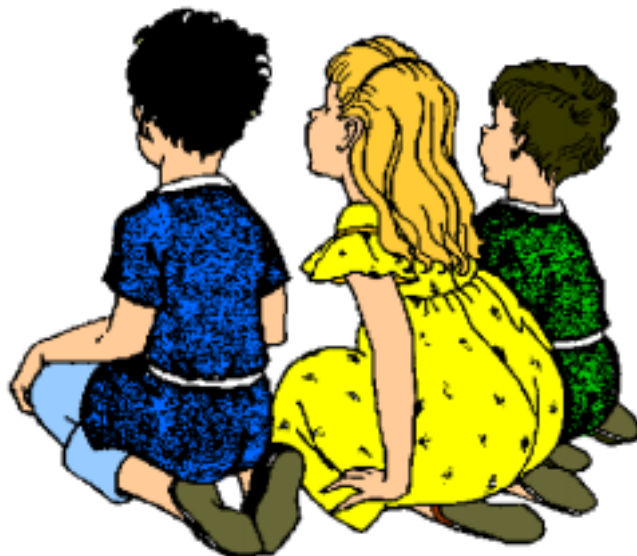
- P Increases in attendance,
- P Student self-reports of a more positive and calm environment,
- P Teacher reports of a more positive and calm environment,
- P Reduction in the proportion of students who engage in behavioral disruptions, and
- P Reduction in the number of behavioral disruptions.



Importance of Alternative Programs to Safe School Programs

Developing school-wide alternative programs is also an important component of comprehensive school-wide discipline planning. Many Florida districts have established very effective alternative programs to continue educating students who previously would have dropped and/or been suspended or expelled. Characteristics of effective alternative programs include the following:

- s Comprehensive support system for students: a place where students, teachers and parents respect one another and are deeply interested in one another's success,
- s Intensive individualized instruction in credit-earning coursework,
- s Psychological and mental health consultation and counseling,
- s Effective instructional techniques with curriculum demands that match each student's academic and vocational skills,
- s Continuation of special education services for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs),
- s Positive behavioral supports, including social skills, life skills and anger management skills within a structured school environment,
- s Transition services that support the return to a regular school,
- s Community agency involvement, including mental health programs, social services, law enforcement and juvenile justice, and
- s Active family involvement.





One County's Efforts



Realizing that each school and school district is different and that each must identify its own needs and the strategies appropriate to them, the SDDFS Office includes this material to illustrate how Sarasota County is currently approaching the issue of planning for a safe learning environment for its students. Included below is a draft statement that was circulated in the recent Sarasota County Safe Schools Summer Institute, identifying and defining strategies that each school in the county should have in place, as each pursues the goal of creating safe and orderly schools for the children of Florida.

Sarasota County School District

(Draft, used by permission of Sherri Reynolds, Sarasota County Safe and Drug Free Schools)

The Sarasota County School District will ensure a safe and orderly environment for ALL students and will provide the leadership, professional development, instructional practices, remediation and enrichment to guarantee achievement of this standard.

Schools should

- Train appropriate staff to accurately report and monitor disciplinary incidents.
- Use annual needs assessment data to develop, implement and modify the school's Safe and Orderly School Plan.
- Institute a comprehensive Character Education program.
- Disseminate expectations for student conduct and attendance to staff, students, parents and the community.
- Provide students with violence and substance abuse prevention education, anger management skills, decision-making skills and conflict mediation skills.
- Develop and implement peer mediation programs.
- Provide diversity/sensitivity training for staff and students.
- Ensure that all students receive instruction using the district's comprehensive health curriculum including anti-smoking and tobacco education.
- Institute programs to recognize student success.
- Limit expulsions by providing opportunities for students through Second Chance School placements.
- Develop in-school suspension programs to reduce the behaviors resulting in out-of-school suspensions.
- Provide professional development to staff on effective classroom behavior management strategies, Crisis Prevention Intervention and Techniques for Effective Aggression Management.
- Establish school-based programs in collaboration with community organizations to address the needs of at-risk students.
- Collaborate with students' families to improve student behavior and attendance.
- Institute an aggressive "call home" practice to check student absences.
- Use attendance workers to intervene with truant students and their parents/guardians.
- Implement technology systems which allow parents/guardians easy online access to their child's daily attendance.

Resources for Technical Assistance

The goal of this edition of SDDFS Notes has been to provide educators with material that will assist districts and schools as they develop, review, and enhance their comprehensive discipline plans. The bibliography that follows provides additional information to educators and others who are interested in providing a safe, secure learning environment for our children, one in which they can achieve to their highest potential and reach the academic expectations set forth for them by current measures of accountability.

The members of the SDDFS staff, as well as the staff of the Safe Schools Office at the Department of Education, stand ready to provide support through training and technical assistance to schools and school districts. Please encourage educators to take advantage of our services.

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