REDUCING
STUDENT AND TEACHER
DROPOUT RATES
IN SOUTH CAROLINA

SOUTH CAROLINA
appleseed
LEGAL JUSTICE CENTER

"Public high schools in South Carolina graduate only 61.7 percent of their students. This is 12 percent less than the national average and 26 percent less than the state's federally-defined graduation performance goal."

—EDUCATION WEEK[1]

"Every school day, 136 students drop out of high school in South Carolina."

—EDUCATION WEEK[2]

WE CAN REDUCE THE STUDENT AND TEACHER DROPOUT RATES IN SOUTH CAROLINA BY IMPROVING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE.

OF THE 63,394 STUDENTS WHO ENTERED HIGH SCHOOL IN OUR STATE IN 2005, AN ESTIMATED 24,280 never graduated.[3] This unacceptably high dropout rate is cause for alarm for our community, economy and public safety. South Carolina's teacher dropout rate is equal cause for alarm. One-third of teachers exit the profession within their first five years of service in the state.[4] The most common reasons cited are "lack of support from administration" and "difficulty with students."[5]

South Carolina's students and teachers are dropping out for the same reason—school discipline. Left with few alternatives for handling problems in the classroom, many schools employ harsh discipline methods such as suspensions, expulsions, placements in alternative schools and referrals to law enforcement. When students are removed from school, they are being denied the educational opportunity that we believe is every child's right. Research shows these removals are counterproductive and more likely to lead to academic failure and student dropouts.[6]

Harsh discipline leads to school dropouts. Discipline problems cause teachers to leave their jobs. This is an emergency situation for South Carolina. Students and teachers need help.

Fortunately, there are tools that teachers and administrators can use to keep our schools safe and productive. These tools can help our students and teachers stay in school. By implementing relatively simple and cost-effective evidence-based discipline practices such as School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), educators have the power to transform South Carolina's schools. SWPBIS refers to systemic change in how a school or district operates. The underlying theme is preventing problem behaviors by teaching behavioral expectations in the same manner as any subject.

Comprehensive school discipline reform will require commitment and cooperation from a diverse group of education stakeholders, including state lawmakers, the South Carolina Department of Education, school administrators, school board members, teachers, parents and students. The more stakeholders involved, the more likely we can end this school-to-prison pipeline in our state.

This report is a call for our fellow citizens—parents, grandparents, caregivers, policymakers and interested community members—to take action and change our schools for the better. It is within our power. Together, we can create safe and orderly classrooms that ensure our teachers can focus on teaching and preparing our children for the future.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A detailed set of recommendations can be found on page 19.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS:

» Ensure that schools in your community and around the state reserve student disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe of disruptive behaviors. School discipline codes and board policies should explicitly define those behaviors.

» Advocate at the local and state levels to replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies— such as zero-tolerance policies—with graduated systems of discipline where consequences reflect the severity of the infraction. This strategy should consider the circumstances of the incident as well as behavior.

TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS:

» Resolve low-level misconduct in the classroom and amend school board policies to reflect this practice. School handbooks and district policies should state a commitment to keeping students within the classroom and to limiting the use of exclusionary discipline.

» Ensure that when school resource officers or other law enforcement officials are involved with students, they address serious criminal misconduct and respect the rights of children in school.

STATE LEGISLATORS:

» The legislature must repeal or significantly amend the "Disturbing Schools" statute to remove the current catch-all wording that permits the arrest of students for any number of typical misbehaviors, including "acting obnoxiously."

» The legislature must amend state law so that school boards do not have the discretion to expel a student for vague infractions, such as "gross misbehavior," "persistent disobedience" or "other acts as determined by local school authorities."

» School districts should be required to disaggregate and report data by school on suspensions, expulsions and criminal charges against students. This information should include the duration of each exclusion from school and the reason for the discipline. Districts also should be required to report the number of students readmitted to school after the end of their punishment.

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS

SOUTH CAROLINA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM IS IN CRISIS. ALTHOUGH IT HAS MADE SOME PROGRESS in student achievement, it lags behind the national average in every category of student performance. In the national achievement tests for K-12 students, South Carolina is below most other states in every grade and subject area tested. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, South Carolina's students score below the national average in mathematics, reading, science and writing.[7]

South Carolina is home to some of the poorest rural school districts in the country. More than 285,000 students—or 4 in 10 students in the state—attend a public school in a rural area.[8] South Carolina ranks sixth in the nation in rural student poverty—a student population with an especially high growth rate in South Carolina.[9] Our state also has one of the lowest rural student graduation rates in the country. These rural students have been neglected for far too long in South Carolina, and significant improvement in the graduation rate is necessary.

South Carolina consistently ranks near the bottom of the national standings in other important measures of education performance. It has one of the highest dropout rates in the nation. Its high school graduation rate is among the worst in the nation. The graduation rate for students with disabilities is particularly alarming: only 40.3 percent of students with disabilities in South Carolina graduate on time with a regular high school diploma.[10]

But South Carolina's school discipline rates consistently rank among the highest in the country. Research tells us that discipline rates and dropout rates are closely related. It also tells us that punishments such as out-of-school suspension are counterproductive to a student's success. School discipline issues are a major factor in teachers' decisions to leave the profession.[11] Teachers who have left the profession have said that they need more professional development on how to work with students who are not achieving at high levels.[12]

Not even two-thirds of all students graduate in South Carolina. This is one of the lowest rates in the country.

WHAT IS "PUSHOUT?"

School policies such as harsh discipline and other negative treatment can act as a "pushout" which causes some students to leave school voluntarily. These students may have been labeled troublemakers and are pushed out through discipline or transfers to other schools. Sometimes students leave school because they are simply following the suggestion of a school staff person that they should find somewhere else to go. Pushout has severe and lasting consequences for parents, schools and communities.

A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO SOUTH CAROLINA'S STUDENT DROPOUT RATE IS SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

ONE STUDENT'S STORY

Joseph was 13 when he started to experience frequent bullying at school. He felt forced to defend himself when attacked by the other students. Under the school's discipline rules, all students involved in a fight receive the same punishment – regardless of who started the fight. Joseph received several multi-day out-of-school suspensions for these incidents. He became increasingly alienated from his school. His academic achievement suffered. Joseph ended up repeating the seventh grade. He eventually dropped out of school.

A STUDENT IS MORE LIKELY TO DROP OUT IF HE OR SHE HAS BEEN SUSPENDED OR expelled.[13] A student is also more likely to drop out after being retained for a grade[14]—an almost inevitable consequence of multiple suspensions. According to 2009-10 data, the most recent available, more than 103,000 suspensions were issued in South Carolina and more than 3,900 students were expelled.[15] The state's 14.78 percent suspension rate is one of the highest in the nation.[16]

These discipline numbers are out of balance with enrollment trends in the state. From 2000 to 2006, South Carolina's public school enrollment increased only 4.8 percent, but expulsions increased 18.48 percent.[17] These punishments were not meted out evenly among groups of students. Disproportionate numbers of students of color in the state received harsh discipline. While 6.9 percent of the state's white students were suspended, 19.2 percent of its black students received that punishment.[18] Additionally, the expulsion rate for black students was almost four times higher than the rate for white students.[19] This trend holds true in many states across the country.

And, while there has been a reduction in expulsions reported, this may not necessarily mean that students are instead experiencing positive outcomes. In many instances, students and parents make the decision that their student should withdraw from school rather than face an expulsion hearing. In South Carolina, school districts have the option of refusing to enroll any student who has previously been expelled from school.
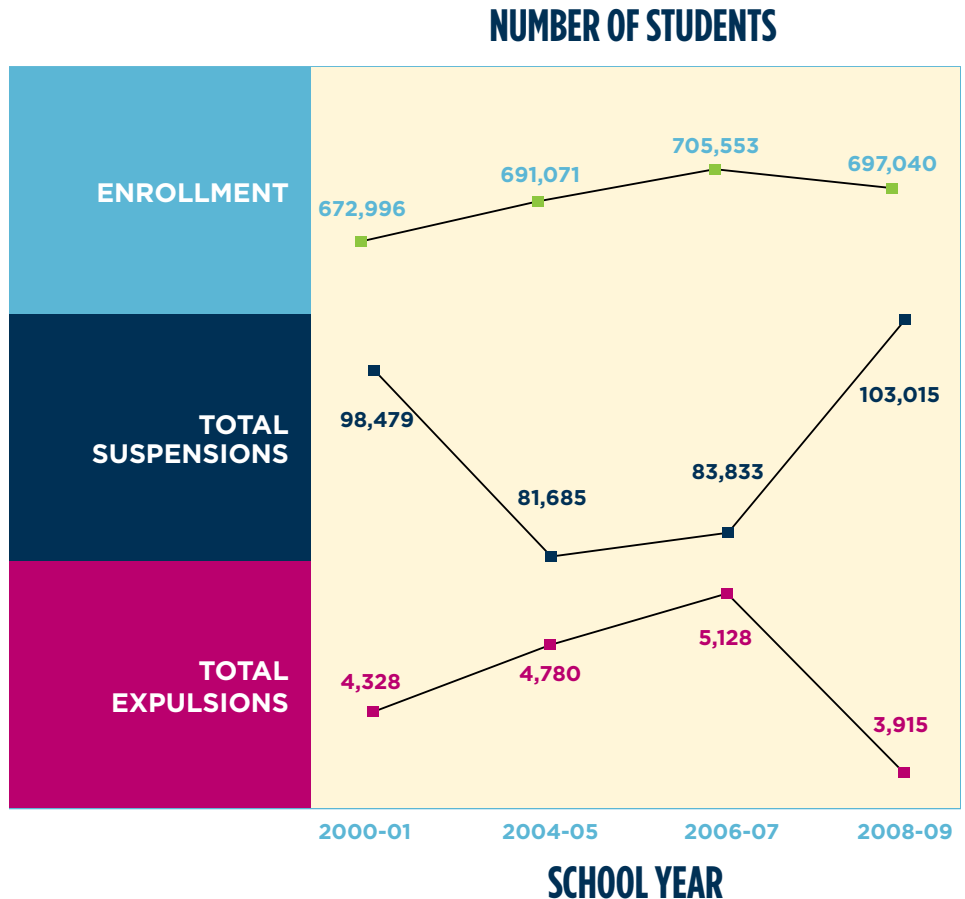
Generally, schools that report higher suspension rates tend to have lower student achievement.[20] Also, students who are suspended frequently are at much greater risk of dropping out of school.[21]

In South Carolina, the correlation between nationally high discipline rates, high dropout rates and low graduation rates is clearly evident. Our students need to develop the academic skills that will enable them to become productive citizens.

This can only be done, however, in classrooms where the school disciplinary program reduces problem behavior and improves the learning environment for students and teachers.

Fixing school discipline is <u>not</u> an impossible task. We can do it the same way we have been working to improve math scores—by giving teachers and schools the tools they need. We can begin by implementing cost-effective programs, such as School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), which have been proven to reduce school discipline problems and increase the graduation rate. SWPBIS also can improve teacher job satisfaction and replace antiquated procedures that are not backed by data and research.

Our students and teachers are capable of high achievement. We need to support them with proven methods to keep our schools safe and successful.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

	2000-01	2004-05	2006-07	2008-09
ENROLLMENT	672,996	691,071	705,553	697,040
TOTAL SUSPENSIONS	98,479	81,685	83,833	103,015
TOTAL EXPULSIONS	4,328	4,780	5,128	3,915

SCHOOL YEAR

THE TEACHER DROPOUT PROBLEM

THE CONSTANT PRESSURE OF DEALING WITH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE ISSUES IS PUSHING TOO many teachers out of the classroom. In a 2005 national survey of teachers leaving the profession, 44 percent of teachers and 39 percent of highly qualified teachers cited student behavior as a reason for leaving. According to a 2004 national survey of middle and high school teachers, 76 percent of teachers indicated that they would be better able to educate students if discipline problems were not so prevalent.[22]

Teacher turnover is a major barrier to student success in school districts across South Carolina. Teacher dropout rates as high as 30 percent are regularly reported.[23] Many of the school districts reporting those high rates have very few students experiencing academic success. They are places where teacher recruitment and retention is an ongoing struggle.[24] The teaching force in many districts is marked by higher rates of substandard certificates, teachers teaching out of their field of expertise, and long-term substitutes. In our state, highly-qualified teachers holding degrees from competitive colleges are much less likely to choose teaching positions in high-poverty, low-wealth districts. As many as a quarter of the teachers in some districts leave each year, which means that these districts are hiring, at best, brand-new, inexperienced teachers ill-equipped to meet the needs of the student population. At worst, these districts are hiring uncertified, substandard staff lacking sufficient training in the educational process.

Teacher turnover imposes significant burdens on school administrators. They must find, train and mentor new teachers out of a shrinking pool of qualified applicants. They repeat this process each year. The departure of experienced teachers leaves our schools with less leadership and guidance for the new teachers hired to fill their void. This continuous shuffle only damages a school's sense of community and performance. South Carolina's teachers must have the tools and support necessary to teach effectively and keep students and teachers in school.

A 6-year-old kindergarten student in Sumter, S.C., was expelled from school earlier this year for taking her brother's broken toy gun to school for show and tell. She lost a month of school before the district superintendent reinstated her after the case attracted state and national media attention.

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES HARM SOUTH CAROLINA'S CHILDREN

INITIALLY INTENDED AS A RESPONSE TO WEAPON AND DRUG OFFENSES, ZERO-TOLERANCE discipline policies have grown in popularity as administrators and school boards have bought in to the misguided notion that simply removing a student from school will make schools safer and more productive learning environments.

Under such policies, schools have pre-determined punishments for a wide range of misbehavior, rather than taking individual circumstances or previous conduct into account. This one-size-fits-all approach to school discipline is ineffective. Zero-tolerance policies fail to address the underlying causes of misbehavior and exacerbate existing problems.

There is no credible evidence that zero-tolerance policies are an effective means for changing student behavior. All relevant research, including a recent study by the American Psychological Association, prove that zero-tolerance approaches do not result in safer, more orderly classrooms.[25] Studies have found that 30 to 50 percent of suspended students will continue to misbehave.[26] In one study, researchers concluded that "for some students, suspension functions as more of a reinforcer than a punisher."[27] That is, dismissal from school is actually a reward to students for whom school is a constant struggle.

Students suspended from school are much more likely to engage in troublesome behavior. According to the Centers for Disease Control, "out of school" youth are significantly more likely than "in school" youth to fight, carry a weapon, smoke, use alcohol, marijuana and other drugs as well as engage in sexual intercourse.[28]

THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR SOUTH CAROLINA

THE "SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE" IS THE NAME FOR THE TREND OF INCARCERATING, RATHER than educating our nation's children. It becomes much more likely that a student will drop out of school when he or she is arrested at school, receives zero-tolerance discipline or other punishment that takes the student out of the classroom and learning process. When students are assigned in-school or out-of-school suspension, their education is interrupted, and often this punishment starts a chain of events that will permanently harm a child. Missed classes can lead to academic failure which causes many students to give up on school and drop out. Research proves that students who drop out of school are much more likely to end up in prison than students who graduate.

South Carolina, like many other states, has a school-to-prison pipeline. It starts when students are suspended or expelled for minor offenses or charged with a crime for actions that are not violent or severe. Instead of handling relatively minor disruptive behavior through traditional, nonexclusionary discipline methods such as after-school detention or contacting parents, many schools are turning to the court system.

In South Carolina, one of the most frequent charges that results in students being referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is a vaguely-written law that makes "disturbing schools" a crime. Family court judges in 2011-12 found their courtrooms clogged with more than 1,200 of these cases where students have been referred for nonviolent misbehavior.[29] The wording of the law has resulted in many students being arrested for incidents such as throwing pencils, running in hallways and acting "obnoxiously."[30]

Students in need of special education services are another group of students particularly at risk of being caught in the pipeline. These students are arrested or referred to court at higher rates than others. The rate of students with special needs in juvenile justice facilities often greatly outpaces the rate of students with special needs in schools.[31] There is also concern in South Carolina about the use of seclusion rooms and restraints with students with disabilities— two harsh and dangerous disciplinary measures. In South Carolina, three times as many students enrolled in the Department of Juvenile Justice special school district are receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as compared to regular schools.[32]

There are disparities in how punishment is meted out in this pipeline. Of the 106,930 incidents where a child was removed from class or school in 2009—the last year for which data is available—54.64 percent were given to African-American students, who make up only 37.11

percent of the student population.[33] A DJJ study of South Carolina's African-American youth using 2004-05 data found that these students accounted for 58 percent of juvenile arrests, 60 percent of the youth in detention and 69 percent of the youth in correctional institutions.[34]

Not surprisingly, involvement in the juvenile justice system, which disrupts a child's education, is often a direct path to school dropout. Court involvement may hurt a student's ability to stay in school in several ways. First, appearing before a judge means missing hours of class—weeks if the student is placed in a residential facility. Children with frequent classroom absences are likely to fall further behind their peers. Second, involvement in the juvenile justice system is likely to have a harmful effect on how students are treated at school. It also affects how students perceive themselves and their educational potential. The detrimental effects of involvement in juvenile justice system are backed by empirical evidence. One study found that a first-time arrest during high school nearly doubles the odds of a student dropping out while a court appearance nearly quadruples those odds.[35]

South Carolina's 2008-09 high school graduation rate of 61.7 percent ranks the state 47th in the nation.[36] This educational crisis has effects far beyond high school, though. The pervasive poverty in our state is hurting children, families, our economy and prospects for a bright future.

More than 1 in 5 children in South Carolina under the age of 6 live in poverty. Thirteen percent of all children in the state live in extreme poverty.[37] In addition, South Carolina ranks 45th among states for overall child well-being.[38]

The dropout problem has had disastrous consequences for South Carolina's future workforce. In 2009, approximately three-fourths of adults in the state did not have a college degree and almost 1 out of every 4 adults did not have a high school diploma.[39] South Carolina ranks 36th in the nation in the percentage of adults with bachelor's degrees.[40] In 2011, South Carolina ranked 46th in the nation in per capita income.[41] On average, each person in the state has almost $8,000 less income than the average American.[42]

The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that South Carolina's high school dropouts from the class of 2009 would have earned an additional $5.7 billion in their lifetimes had they graduated.[43] Instead, they have a much higher risk of entering the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Incarcerating a student can cost as much as $100,000 per year.[44] By reducing the number of students referred to the criminal justice system for minor in-school misbehavior, we can also reduce the number of students who drop out—and save South Carolina money it needs to educate our children—without sacrificing school safety.

South Carolina's schools need better ways to deal with student discipline. Our children's academic and personal growth—as well as the growth of South Carolina's economy—depends on it. It is clear that zero-tolerance policies and school discipline practices that depend on suspensions, expulsions and referrals to law enforcement are not working. So how can a school maintain a safe and orderly learning environment that will be conducive to learning?

"According to a report by a special state commission created to study and address children's needs, most children in the Department of Juvenile Justice are nonviolent and the majority of them have a diagnosable mental health condition or learning disability."

— JOINT CITIZENS AND LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN 2011 ANNUAL REPORT, FEBRUARY 1, 2011

THE SOLUTION: SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

THERE IS A SOLUTION. WHILE NEW LEGISLATION AND ADDITIONAL FUNDS ARE urgently needed for certain changes, we can immediately alter the policies and practices of schools to avoid the discipline that is hurting so many students by pushing them out of class. Evidence-based school discipline practices are available to help teachers maintain a safe and productive learning environment while ensuring that children are removed from school only as a last resort. Every teacher in South Carolina can be trained in evidence-based discipline practices. Every child can be disciplined with methods that have been shown to improve behavior. In fact, some South Carolina schools are already implementing evidence-based discipline practices with great success.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports—called SWPBIS, or just PBIS for short—is a process of changing a school's climate to prevent problem behaviors by:

» **TEACHING DESIRABLE BEHAVIORS** to all students;

» **POSITIVELY RECOGNIZING** these appropriate behaviors;

» increasing **POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE** feedback for students; and

» helping students learn behaviors that **SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT** in school and **MEANINGFUL OPTIONS** for their futures.

PBIS is currently practiced to one degree or another in nearly 8,000 schools across the country, including almost 250 South Carolina schools.[45] It is recommended or required by statute in three states. It is the subject of statewide initiatives or school/university partnerships in all 50 states.

When implemented properly, PBIS has shown positive effects in elementary, middle and high schools. It also has been effective in schools with high percentages of at-risk students. According to the South Carolina Department of Education, PBIS is a "major advance in school-wide discipline."

South Carolina districts that have implemented SWPBIS have described it as having a positive impact in schools. At one elementary school, discipline referrals dropped from 900 to less than 100 since the implementation of SWPBIS.[46]

Find out if your school has SWPBIS

The South Carolina Department of Education has encouraged SWPBIS implementation in South Carolina by offering extensive training, technical assistance, and support for schools who want to make this positive change for their students. To learn more about SWPBIS in our state, go to: ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/173/ PositiveBehaviorInterventionsandSupports.cfm.

WHAT IS THE PBIS MODEL?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a research-based method for improving student behavior and creating a safe and productive school climate. PBIS is:

PROACTIVE: All students are taught the critical social skills needed for success. PBIS schools set clear expectations for behavior, acknowledge and reward appropriate behavior, and implement a consistent continuum of consequences for problem behavior. Students with serious or chronic behavior problems receive assessments to determine the causes of their behavior. These assessments help staff develop individualized interventions and specialized behavior supports.

COMPREHENSIVE: PBIS is employed throughout the entire school, including the cafeteria, the buses and the hallways. All school personnel are trained in PBIS and are continually supported in implementing it.

DATA-DRIVEN: Schools rely on data, such as office referrals, to develop and modify their PBIS approach (e.g. When and where do most office referrals occur? Which teachers are referring the most students? Which students are most often referred?). PBIS teams use this data to design specific interventions to head off problem behavior before it occurs and to confirm that those interventions were effective.

PBIS schools implement a range of interventions designed to address the needs of a diverse student body. One of the most important principles of PBIS is that it matches the severity of the discipline problem to the intervention or consequence.

Each student brings a unique personality, background and behavior pattern to school. PBIS provides a common language to help all adults—teachers, administrators, staff and parents—dealing with students.

THERE ARE THREE LEVELS OF PBIS INTERVENTION:

UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS, such as school-wide social skills training curricula and school rule education campaigns prevent the development of problem behaviors and apply to all students.

> *These are supports and practices that can be used for every student in a PBIS school to help his or her behavior. These include reminders/redirection, detention, conferencing with a student to provide corrective feedback, re-teaching behavioral expectations, loss of privileges, and working with the student to choose an appropriate way to apologize and make amends to those harmed or offended.*

SECONDARY INTERVENTIONS address the needs of more challenging students who exhibit difficult behavior that limits their academic and social success.

> *Secondary interventions apply to about 15 percent of students. These interventions include behavioral contracts, conflict resolution training, self-management strategies, meeting with a social worker or other mentoring adult in "check-and-connect" programs (programs where students check in with a concerned staff member every day) and high-quality in-school suspension[47] where the student receives help with academics and behavioral issues.*

TERTIARY INTERVENTIONS are specialized, intensive strategies used to address the most challenging students' chronic academic and behavioral difficulties.

> *These strategies are needed for only about 5 percent of students. They include using Functional Behavior Assessments to identify the cause—or function—of a student's difficult behavior and ways to prevent it. These preventive measures include a behavior support plan and counseling, out-of-school punishments, referrals to social services, school-based health services and family conferences with other community supports, such as mental health or family counseling services.*

INTENSIVE INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS

TARGETED GROUP INTERVENTIONS

UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS

-5%

-15%

-80%
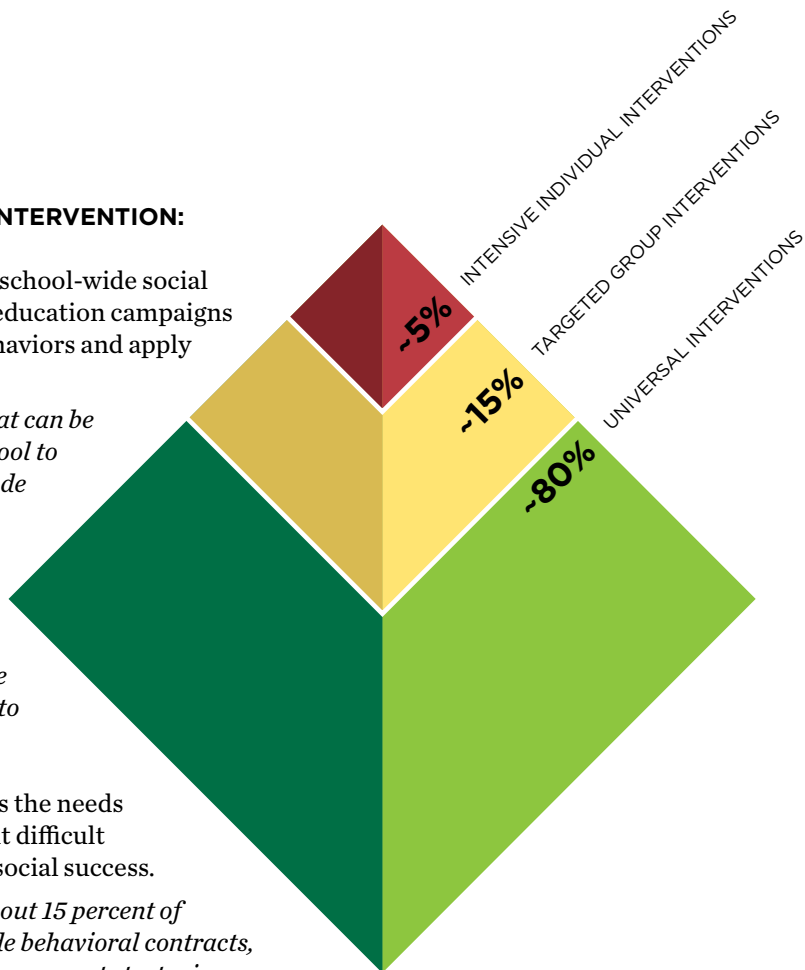
SOUTH CAROLINA TEACHERS COMMENT ON PBIS

"Our school is a PBIS school and has seen very effective and positive changes in our school environment. Our administrators and PBIS coaches are very supportive and helpful in creating this positive change."

— SOUTH CAROLINA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

"I think PBIS teaching and expecting positive behaviors has helped a great deal in our school."

— SOUTH CAROLINA MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

"We use PBIS at our school and it proves to be very effective for us. We are now much more consistent in how we handle our students."

— SOUTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

SCHOOLS THAT EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT PBIS HAVE:

» *Reduced office referral rates – and, consequently, suspension and expulsion rates – by as much as 50 percent per year*[48]

» *Reduced dropout rates*[49]

» *Reduced delinquency and drug use*[50]

» *Increased instructional time as a result of reduced office referral rates*

» *Improved attendance and school engagement*[51]

» *Improved academic achievement*[52]

» *Improved school atmosphere*[53]

PBIS is also consistent with special education programs. In fact, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act encourages the use of PBIS to reduce the need to suspend or expel students with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs operates a National Technical Assistance Center that promotes PBIS and provides capacity-building information and technical support to states and school districts. You can visit the website at: **www.pbis.org.**

RESULTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY
HOW PBIS WORKS

These stories of students from around the country illustrate the proven ways schools use PBIS to address behavioral problems. Sid's story shows the universal or primary prevention methods that PBIS schools use to reduce behavioral problems in the student body.

David and Mary's stories reflect the more intensive, secondary interventions used to address the smaller group of students for whom primary prevention methods do not suffice. Terry's story demonstrates how PBIS schools address the behavior of the handful of students requiring the most intensive, individualized interventions for their serious behavior problems.

SID is a seventh grade student at a middle school in the largest city in his state. For several years it was a school in crisis. It had declining test scores, rising truancy rates and an increasing number of out-of-school suspensions. The neighborhood also experienced an increase in the rate of juvenile crime. Sid was one of the students who had more than his share of absences and discipline referrals. He was suspended three times in the sixth grade.

But last year the school began using PBIS. The school's PBIS leadership team has helped the staff make strategic changes. The staff began the school year by establishing a uniform set of expectations for school behavior. Teachers taught these expectations to students, rewarded students who complied and developed consistent, appropriate consequences for those who did not comply. The staff also learned how to use school-wide discipline data to make intervention decisions when dealing with student misbehavior. Sid and his fellow students have benefited from these changes.

This year, Sid has had only two office discipline referrals. His attendance has been much more regular. The increased time he's spent in class seems to have helped him academically. His achievement test scores have improved from the 30th percentile overall to the 50th percentile.

In the past two months, Sid received two office discipline referrals for misbehaving in the hallways. The PBIS leadership team noted a general increase in office discipline referrals from school hallways. At a staff meeting, it was agreed that the school-wide expectation to "respect others" should be defined as "stay to the right" in hallways and on stairs. They also agreed that during transitions, teachers would stand outside their doors acknowledging students who follow this rule and correcting those who do not.

Two weeks after this procedure had taken effect, hallway discipline referrals dropped from an average of 11 per day to two. Sid was corrected once for failing to meet the expectation but has since received only praise for his behavior in the hallways.
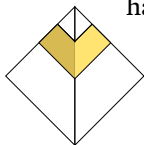
DAVID recently transferred to a new high school that is implementing PBIS. The 16-year-old would drop out of school if his mother would allow it. At his previous school, he accumulated 28 out-of-school suspensions for infractions such as truancy and disobedience. He failed the seventh grade because of these unexcused absences.

PBIS has become an integral part of dropout prevention strategies across the nation. At David's new school, the staff has adopted a set of evidence-based practices for helping such "at-risk" students.

David is on a "check-and-connect" plan at school. This plan involves David checking in every morning with his homeroom teacher to talk about his day, set goals and review his assignments. At the end of the day, he drops by her room to briefly review his day, check

homework assignments and talk about things in general. The goal is to prevent David from dropping out by engaging him with school and his teachers. To measure the plan's effectiveness, David's counselor is keeping track of his attendance. With the school year almost over, he has had only four absences—all of those absences are excused. He is doing better academically and has been participating in after-school intramural sports.
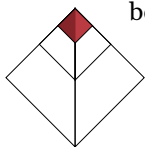
MARY is a student with limited English proficiency at a junior high school that is still learning how to effectively teach beyond the language barrier. With these communication and cultural barriers, it is not surprising that Mary's friendships are sometimes more important to her than her relationships with teachers.

Mary's school began implementing PBIS this year. Disciplinary referrals dropped, but the number of tardies increased. After trying a couple of school-wide interventions, the school began to identify the students who were consistently tardy. Mary and her friends were among those identified.

The school created a "check-and-connect" program where Mary and 13 other students met one-on-one with the same teacher or administrator once or twice a week. They used the time to check in, talk and outline academic goals—as well as goals for reducing their tardiness. At the end of five weeks, 10 of the 14 students were no longer late for class.

Mary, as well as some of her friends, built a positive relationship with her school and teachers. She said that when her other friends were running late, she left them behind because she wanted to "pass the program." In other words, she wanted to do well in the targeted intervention. Mary's grades also have improved. She now tells people that she wants to be a teacher.

TERRY is a fifth-grader with bipolar disorder. He has been on medication for the past three years. His school is implementing PBIS, but despite primary and secondary prevention efforts, Terry continues to receive office discipline referrals for aggressive behavior toward his peers. He was even suspended for threatening another student earlier in the school year.

A behavior support team was assembled to address Terry's problem behavior. A functional behavioral assessment was conducted to identify events that may predict his aggressive behavior. Based on this assessment, it was theorized that Terry engages in aggressive behavior—verbal threats—to avoid being teased by other students. Terry's behavior support team developed an individualized behavior intervention plan for him. Part of this plan involves teaching Terry other ways to respond to teasing. He has been taught to walk away or report the teasing to a teacher.

Teachers and other school staff watch Terry's interactions with peers in classrooms, hallways and other commons areas. When they see him using appropriate alternative responses to peer teasing—his "replacement behaviors"—they give him praise. Terry also gives himself five points on his self-monitoring card. If they see him respond to teasing by making verbal threats, a staff member immediately corrects him and the other student. Terry also deducts five points on his self-monitoring card.

Another part of the plan included a peer mentor (a student with high social status) accompanying Terry around the building during the first two weeks of the intervention. This student, who was selected daily from a group of trained volunteers, informally coached Terry and other students in using appropriate social skills.

After two weeks, the team decided that it wasn't necessary for the peer mentor to be with Terry at all times. Instead, the peer mentors made it a point to interact with Terry in common areas, thereby modeling appropriate social interactions for other peers. Six weeks after this plan was initiated, Terry had not received any office discipline referrals for aggressive behavior. In fact, he has been seen interacting more frequently and positively with peers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN A SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE WITHOUT A HEAVY reliance on removing students from the classroom. Out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, alternative schools and referrals to the criminal justice system can become a less central part of school discipline by taking the actions listed below. We all have a role in making these changes that will improve our state's schools and reduce South Carolina's dropout rate. Our schools and our children deserve nothing less.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

» Ensure that schools in your community and around the state reserve disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe of disruptive behaviors. School discipline codes and board policies should define those behaviors explicitly.

» Advocate at the local and state levels to replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies—such as zero-tolerance—with graduated systems of discipline, where consequences are geared to the seriousness of the infraction and consider the circumstances of the incident as well as behavior.

» Ensure that schools in your community and around the state adopt other discipline strategies into their codes of conduct that, whenever possible, keep students in school and provide options other than suspensions, expulsions and removals to alternative schools. Some of these strategies are listed in the next section.

» Encourage school districts to implement school-wide PBIS in every school.

» Encourage state legislators to support funding for PBIS and other evidence-based school discipline methods.

» Ensure that students of color and students with disabilities are not disproportionately subject to disciplinary measures or criminal penalties. Ask your school and school district leaders to provide the numbers of disciplinary incidents each year and the demographic information about the students receiving these punishments.

» Ask your school and district leaders to set goals of reducing school suspensions, expulsions and arrests as part of improvement plans.

» Ensure that schools in your community and around the state are helping students struggling academically or behaviorally by providing them with access to tutoring, mental health services and other interventions.

» If your student is removed from school, ask for written documentation as well as written assignments and the ability to complete make-up work.

» Use this report to begin a discussion about effective school discipline for schools in your community and around the state.

TEACHERS

Resolve low-level misconduct in the classroom with alternative corrective strategies, such as:

» Conference with the student to provide corrective feedback.

» Re-teach behavioral expectations.

» Mediate conflict between students or students and staff. Assign appropriate consequences.

» Create behavior contracts that include expected behaviors, consequences for infractions and incentives for demonstrating positive behaviors.

» Offer opportunities for student completion of school/community service tasks.

» Open and maintain lines of communication between the school and the student's home.

» Provide a reflective activity about the offense that allows the student to consider how it affected the student, others and the school.

» Impose loss of a privilege in response to misconduct.

» Make a schedule adjustment to create more positive and supportive learning environments where the student can succeed.

» Create a check-and-connect plan for the student with a caring adult in the school.

» Require daily or weekly check-ins with an administrator for a set period of time.

» Refer the student to a counselor, social worker, interventionist, or student support team in the school.

» Arrange for the student to receive services from a counseling, mental health or mentoring agency.

» Work with the student to choose an appropriate way to apologize and make amends to those harmed or offended.

» Provide after-school detention or high-quality in-school suspension where the student receives assistance with academics and behavioral issues.

» Use this report to begin a discussion about effective school discipline for schools in your community and around the state.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

» Support teacher efforts to resolve low-level misconduct in the classroom. Amend school board policies to reflect this practice and state a commitment to keeping students within the learning environment and limiting the time spent outside of class.

» When school resource officers or other law enforcement officials are involved with students, ensure that they address serious criminal misconduct, respect the rights of children in school and participate in PBIS initiatives.

» Ensure that student misbehavior that does not threaten school safety is treated as a disciplinary infraction rather than a criminal violation.

» Ensure that students of color and students with disabilities are not disproportionately subject to disciplinary measures or criminal penalties.

» Enact policies that ensure students receive their assignments and make-up work when they are suspended.

- » Collect, analyze and publicly report data on school discipline to better understand and address school safety and disciplinary concerns.Increase the number of schools in the district that have school-based mental health services.

- » Incorporate goals based on reducing discipline referrals and school-based arrests into improvement plans.

- » Use this report to begin a discussion about effective school discipline for schools in your community and around the state.

STATE LEGISLATORS

- » Repeal or significantly amend the "Disturbing Schools" statute to remove the current catch-all wording that permits the arrest of students for typical misbehavior, including "acting obnoxiously."

- » Amend state law so that school boards do not have the discretion to expel a student for vague infractions, such as "gross misbehavior," "persistent disobedience" or "other acts as determined by local school authorities."

- » Limit the total number of days a student can be suspended during the school year.

- » Limit the use of school expulsion by instituting a student age requirement for expulsion.

- » Clarify the law to state that a suspended or expelled student has the right to continue his or her education during the punishment or at its conclusion.

- » Limit the use of school expulsion to circumstances where there is clear and convincing evidence that the student's continuing presence in school is a threat to safety.

- » Enact meaningful quality standards for alternative school staffing and curriculum.

- » Repeal the state law allowing corporal punishment in the state. This law works against the tenets of PBIS.

- » Require school districts to disaggregate and report data by school on suspensions, expulsions, and criminal charges against students. This information should include the duration of each exclusion from school and the reason for the discipline. School districts should be required to report on the number of students readmitted after their punishment.

- » Require the South Carolina Department of Education to notify school districts when they disproportionately discipline minority and special education students.

- » Provide funding for technical assistance to schools that want to expand school-based mental health services and increase funding for such services.

- » Use this report to begin a discussion about effective school discipline for schools in your community and around the state.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATES

In addition to school-wide PBIS, other research-based programs can help create a positive learning environment and address behavior problems without resorting to exclusionary methods, such as suspension and expulsion. These programs need not replace school-wide PBIS; they are usually part of a broader PBIS program. PBIS provides a framework that improves implementation of most of these programs.

ANGER MANAGEMENT
The purposes of anger management are to assist students in learning how to understand and manage feelings of anger. It provides them with tools to avoid escalating negative feelings that lead to confrontations with others. Effective programs have led to decreases in disruptive and aggressive behavior, increases in pro-social behavior, better acceptance by peers and increased on-task behavior.

For more information:
www.emstac.org/registered/topics/posbehavior/early/anger.htm
Elementary and Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center

BULLYING PREVENTION
Evidence-based bullying prevention programs report significant reductions in bullying, fighting, vandalism, and truancy, along with an increase in student satisfaction.

For more information:
www.clemson.edu/olweus
Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

www.stopbullying.gov
National Bullying Prevention Campaign

CONFLICT RESOLUTION
Fighting is among the most common disciplinary infractions. Many schools across the nation have begun to implement conflict resolution programs that teach students the attitudes and skills they need to avoid violence, including empathy, perspective, and improved communication skills. Students can be trained to act as peer mediators, helping other students defuse conflicts in the halls and classrooms. Also, they can help other students in conflict come to cooperative resolutions in mediation sessions. School-wide conflict resolution efforts have shown positive outcomes, including teacher reports of decreased physical violence, increased student cooperation and lower suspension and expulsion rates.

For more information:
www.cfchildren.org
Second Step Violence Prevention program

www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/drugfree/sa2lk16.htm
Resolving Conflict Creatively

MENTORING
Mentoring helps alienated students re-connect to school and the community through tutoring, discussions, field trips or community service. Evaluations of mentoring programs show that, when done right, they can decrease students' violent attitudes, raise self-esteem and career aspirations, and improve social skills and academic achievement.

For more information:
www.mentoring.org
National Mentoring Partnership

MINIMIZING USE OF SECLUSION AND RESTRAINT

Students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the use of seclusion rooms and physical or mechanical restraints in an attempt to change their behavior. Increasing concern about the safety of these practices has brought attention to the matter. National and state organizations have documented the abuse, injury, and deaths of students as a result of these practices. These organizations also have recommended the use of school-wide PBIS as an alternative.

For more information:
www.copaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/UnsafeCOPAAMay_27_2009.pdf
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates national report

pandasc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/2009-SC-Report-Policies-and-Practices-on-the-Use-of-Restraint-Seclusion-and-Timeout-in-SC-Public-Schools1.pdf
Report by the Center for Disability Resources (University of South Carolina), Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities, Inc., and the South Carolina Developmental Disabilities Council

NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION CENTER AND NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION CENTER FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The National Dropout Prevention Center was created to significantly reduce America's dropout rate in K-12 public schools. It uses research and evidence-based solutions to increase high school graduation rates. It is committed to meeting the needs of youth in at-risk situations by shaping school environments that ensure all youth receive the quality education to which they are entitled.

The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities was established to assist in building states' capacity to increase school completion rates for students with disabilities through technical assistance and by providing information about interventions and practices that work.

Both centers are located at Clemson University.

For more information:
www.dropoutprevention.org
National Dropout Prevention Center

www.ndpc-sd.org
National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Restorative practices are a systemic approach to maintaining positive relationships and mutual respect that focuses on (a) establishing processes in classrooms and throughout the school that promote positive, nonviolent ways to deal with anger, resentment and other negative emotions that disrupt the learning process and (b) repairing the harm done to individuals and the community as a result of negative behavior.

Restorative practices are an effective approach for uncovering and resolving the underlying causes of misbehavior. At a high school in West Philadelphia, suspensions dropped by 50 percent during the first year of using restorative practices. At 31 public high schools in Chicago, a peer jury program based on restorative principles helped students peaceably and effectively resolve disciplinary incidents that would have otherwise resulted in more than 1,000 days of learning lost to suspension.

In Denver, a community action organization— Padres & Jovenes Unidos (Parents and Youth United)— successfully advocated for restorative justice programs to be adopted by the Denver Public Schools system as alternatives to suspensions, expulsions and arrests. Statistics showed the number of black and Hispanic students suspended decreased significantly.

For more information:
www.iirp.org
International Institute for Restorative Practices

www.restorativejustice.org
Restorative Justice Online

www.padresunidos.org
Padres and Jovenes Unidos (Parents and Youth United)

SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
Children are an underserved group in the mental health system, with as many as two-thirds of those in need not getting necessary treatment. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, approximately 25,000 children in South Carolina did not receive a necessary mental health service in 2007.

In 1999, the U.S. surgeon general found that schools are the largest provider of mental health services to children and adolescents. School is the only source of mental health care for many of these children. South Carolina has been a leader in creating collaborations across agency, school district and nonprofit lines in order to improve access to services and the overall mental well-being of children in the state. The challenge for South Carolina's system of school-based services is to maintain financial support across systems and obtain start-up funding for all South Carolina schools during state budget shortfalls.

For more information:
www.state.sc.us/dmh/schoolbased/about.htm
South Carolina Department of Mental Health
School-Based Services

www.ideapartnership.org/creating-community/cop-in-practice/school-behavioral-health.html
The National Community of Practice on School Behavioral Health

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE
Established in 2002, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) is a central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education. An initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the WWC produces user-friendly practice guides for educators that address instructional challenges with research-based recommendations for schools and classrooms.

For more information on other resources that can help students and schools:
ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc
What Works Clearinghouse

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