

Student Behavior Management Review Summary

The Legislative Budget Board in partnership with MGT of America, Inc. conducted targeted reviews of six independent school districts (ISD) in Texas. The purpose of this review was to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the Student Behavior Management Systems in each district, with an emphasis on the delivery and accountability of alternative education services. The districts selected for this review were: Dallas ISD, Fort Bend ISD, Conroe ISD, San Antonio ISD, Amarillo ISD, and Ingleside ISD. This review also included interviews and onsite visits with the county juvenile probation departments in Dallas County, Fort Bend County, Montgomery County, Bexar County, and Randall County. The purpose of the visits to the county juvenile probation departments was to learn about the alternative education services provided to students through the departments' juvenile justice alternative education programs (JJAEP) and the pre/post adjudication programs.

In each district, the review team visited two regular education campuses, the in-school suspension (ISS) program, and the disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP). The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with administrators, teachers, and counselors to learn how each district manages student behavior. In each county, the review team visited the JJAEP (if applicable) and/or the pre/post adjudication program and conducted walk-throughs, interviews and focus groups.

For this project district practices were compared to the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) Exemplary Practices and Quality Indicators of Alternative Education. NAEA states that alternative education programs not adopting best practices may, in effect, operate as "dumping grounds" for students with behavior problems or who are perceived as difficult to educate. Students are typically transferred into such schools involuntarily (perhaps as a "last chance") before expulsion. The implementation of a design must reflect a genuine effort to keep students in school and to educate them in ways that are consistent with statewide academic standards.

The following highlights at least one accomplishment from each district reviewed. Texas districts could use these accomplishments as a model for improving their alternative programs. Additionally, there is a summary of the three most common recommendations that were identified in the districts during this project.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Ingleside ISD

The Ingleside high school administration provides daily communication to all staff related to student assignments to in-school suspension (ISS) and the alternative education program (AEP). Interviews and focus groups with staff at the high school indicated that there is daily communication from the administration to all high school staff regarding students' placements in ISS and DAEP. The administration maintains a spreadsheet of student placements that is updated each afternoon and provided to all staff before or during first period each day. This effort helps to keep the teachers informed about the status of their students. The spreadsheet was developed by district staff.

San Antonio ISD

San Antonio ISD's executive leadership participated in the development and implementation of the ISS and DAEP models which has contributed to districtwide acceptance and success of the programs. During the onsite review, it was evident that the superintendent led the development of the ISS and DAEP models. The superintendent was instrumental in obtaining the resources for the development of the models, developing the models, ensuring implementation of the models, and supporting the models after implementation. This leadership has contributed to the success of this district initiative.

Amarillo ISD

Amarillo ISD has implemented a system-wide Positive Behavior System (PBS) to reduce behavior problems leading to office referrals and a high rate of referral to special education. At the time of this project, Amarillo ISD was in its third year of implementation of school-wide PBS, now referred to nationally as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Staff within all schools had been trained on the system and the district is in the implementation stage of this system. PBIS is described by the Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions (2003) as a systems approach for establishing a continuum of proactive, positive discipline procedures for all students, all staff members, and all settings which incorporates positive behavior interventions and supports. While Amarillo ISD is just completing its third year of its progressive implementation, there has been a significant decrease in campus level referrals to ISS since the program began. Administrators and teachers perceive the success of the program is driven by the superintendent's support and expectation that all staff embrace the system.

Dallas ISD

The development and use of the electronic Student Discipline System (SDS) provides efficiency and consistency in student discipline placements. The development and use of the SDS provides campus administrators with an immediate resource for determining appropriate consequences for discipline offenses. The system also helps to ensure the assignment is forwarded to the office of student discipline to be approved or modified as needed. In addition, the system ensures consistency in discipline consequences across Dallas ISD campuses and provides a safety net against inappropriate assignments.

Conroe ISD

The development and use of View-IT provides a two way communication system for regular educators and discipline alternative educators to maintain and share information about students placed in a discipline alternative setting. View-IT was designed to make the student referral process more efficient, reduce work load, reduce the use of paper, and improve communication among stakeholders involved in the referral process for the secondary campuses. View-IT ensures that teachers and appropriate administrators are notified when a student referral is made, that the teachers and parent/guardian are notified that the referral has been processed and the student is assigned an alternative placement. The View-IT program informs teachers of the length of the assignment, the number of days the teacher needs to provide student work, the progress the student is making during the placement, and when the student will return to the classroom. This communication provides all stakeholders the opportunity to collaborate about the student's needs during the alternative placement to ensure maximum student success.

The collaboration between Conroe ISD and the Montgomery County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) provides substantial staffing, instructional, and facility resources to the students of Montgomery County. Conroe ISD and Montgomery County operate the county JJAEP jointly. Conroe ISD recruits, hires, trains, and evaluates the certified teaching staff for the JJAEP. The district also provides the same resource instructional support and materials that are provided to the district staff. While the district oversees the educational component of the program the county provides and maintains an exemplary educational facility for the staff and students. The county also recruits, hires, trains, and evaluates the Juvenile Supervision Officers who monitor the classrooms and hallways in the building. The presence of the supervision officers helps to maintain order in the classroom which contributes to a positive learning environment. Observations and interviews with Conroe ISD administrators, Conroe ISD JJAEP teachers, and county staff reveal a strong collaborative relationship between the district and the county. This strong relationship has led to the continued success of this program.

Fort Bend

The DAEP facility and resources reflect the district's high regard for the program. A review of the facility which houses the four off-campus discipline management programs provides evidence of the district's high regard for the discipline alternative program and the students who are assigned to them. The facility is well maintained, well equipped, and reflective of the other facilities in Fort Bend ISD. Resources provided at the DAEP facility include classroom computers for student use, a computer lab, administrative computers for teacher use, SMART boards, and technology staff to ensure successful integration of technology into classroom lessons. The National Association of State Boards of Education 1996 report noted that regardless "of the location successful [alternative programs] provide healthy physical environments that foster education, emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Districts should develop and implement a program evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of the student behavior management programs to include the ISS, DAEP, and other programs that the district has developed. The six school districts reviewed lack a process to evaluate the discipline alternative education programs and student performance within the program. Some of the challenges that districts experience with the alternative programs could be identified and addressed through a program evaluation process. For example, interviews and focus groups with administrators and teachers identified the following challenges that should be addressed in the alternative settings:

- increase direct instruction;
- align curriculum with the regular classroom;
- incorporate elective opportunities;
- measure student academic performance;
- provide regular classroom experiences (i.e. science labs);
- provide more training for teachers; and
- improve communication with home school.

NGA Center for Best Practices (2001) reports that two best practices of effective alternative programs include collecting and evaluating data and developing data-driven accountability measures. Additionally, the NAEA reports that one exemplary practice for alternative education programs is the systematic evaluation of both programs and student performance to assess program success. Without an evaluation process, districts are not able to assess the effectiveness of their program and make necessary changes to ensure student success. Overall, it is estimated that the cost of an evaluation will be absorbed by the district's existing resources. This may not be the case in a smaller district such as Ingleside ISD where we estimated a cost for an external evaluator at a one-time cost of \$10,000 and an every two year cost of \$2,000.

Recommendation 2: Districts should develop districtwide written procedures for transitioning all students from alternative settings back to the regular classroom. Four of the six districts reviewed lacked complete procedures for transitioning all students back to the regular classroom after completion of the alternative education programs. Interviews and focus groups with administrators, counselors, and teachers revealed that there is a lack of a consistent, clear transition process for students who are returning to the home campus from an alternative setting. Focus groups with teachers reveal that the classroom teacher seldom knows that the student is returning to the regular classroom and has not had an opportunity to review the student's alternative school assignments nor prepare for the student for the current class day.

NAEA is specific about the need for transitional planning and support for students returning to an educational setting in its statement that "clear criteria and procedures for transitioning students from the traditional education setting to the alternative setting and from the alternative program to the students next education . . . setting are essential elements of effective alternative settings." NAEA quality indicators for transitional planning and support include:

- A formal transition process for students from pre-entry through post-exit which includes the following elements: an orientation which consists of rapport building, assessment of the student, IEP review, information and record sharing regarding the student, short- and long-term goal setting, development of an individualized student learner plan, and other mechanisms designed to orient the student to the alternative education setting.
- Student needs (i.e., academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs) are addressed before, during, and after the student's transition.

Recommendation 3: Districts should develop clear procedures and training for ISS instructors or monitors. Three of the districts reviewed lacked clear procedures for operating the ISS program on the campus level. In addition, there was also a lack of training for the instructor or monitor that was assigned to the ISS room. Focus groups and interviews with teachers and principals identified some of the challenges with the ISS programs in districts as:

- lack of counseling;
- lack of tutoring;
- non-certified instructors;
- teachers fail to send student assignments;
- lack of communication between ISS instructor and classroom teachers; and
- too many students are sent to ISS.

The NAEA has identified the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) as a best practice quality indicator for effective alternative education programs. NAEA recommends that program leadership “operate under a current policies and procedures manual that is consistent with the mission and purpose of the program, approved by the local board of education, and articulated to all stakeholders in the form of SOPs.” Developing districtwide procedures and training will help to provide consistency in the ISS programs across the district. These procedures will also ensure that the students behavioral and educational needs are met in the program.