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STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS: SUSPENSION, DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS, AND SCHOOL-WIDE PROACTIVE INTERVENTIONS

At a Glance

Researchers have found that disruptive students have a negative influence on their classmates and teachers. Some school districts suspend disruptive students, others place them in disciplinary alternative schools, and some implement school-wide interventions designed to proactively reduce the occurrence of disruptive behavior. This Information Capsule summarizes some of the negative outcomes associated with out-of-school suspensions that have led many school districts to seek other options for managing disruptive students. The advantages and disadvantages of disciplinary alternative schools and research on their impact on students' future behavior and academic performance are reviewed. A summary of practices that studies have found to be critical to the success of disciplinary alternative schools is also included. Finally, school-wide interventions that are used to reduce the occurrence of disruptive behavior are reviewed.

Classrooms must be free from the threat of violence and disruption in order to provide students with a favorable learning environment. Educators have reported that increasing numbers of students from troubled homes are exhibiting aggressive, disruptive, and defiant behaviors in the classroom (Losen, 2011; Schifano, 2011). Hosley and colleagues (2009) defined disruptive students as those who pose a clear threat to the safety and welfare of other students or school staff, who create an unsafe school environment, or who behave in a way that interferes with the learning of other students.

Studies have found that disruptive students have a negative influence on well-behaving students. When disruptive students remain in the classroom, other students lose critical opportunities for learning. Disruptive students also interfere with the learning process through peer pressure. When students are exposed to misbehavior by their peers, they may be more likely to misbehave themselves (Ford, 2013; Johnston, 2013; Fabelo et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2004).

Disruptive students have a negative impact on teacher effectiveness. In a poll of members of the American Federation of Teachers, 17% said they lost four or more hours of teaching time per week because of disruptive student behavior, and an additional 19% said they lost two or three hours per week (Johnston, 2013). Public Agenda's (2004) *Teaching Interrupted* survey of a national random sample of middle and high school teachers found that 77% of respondents

said their teaching would be a lot more effective if they did not have to spend so much time dealing with disruptive students. More than one in three (34%) respondents said they had seriously considered quitting the profession because of difficulties with student discipline and behavior.

The majority of educators and policymakers agree that the removal of disruptive students from the classroom results in an improved learning environment. Some districts choose to suspend or expel disruptive students. Others temporarily place them in disciplinary alternative schools in an attempt to reduce dysfunctional behaviors and help students build the skills needed to succeed in traditional schools. Some districts implement proactive, school-wide interventions designed to reduce the occurrence of disruptive behavior. The goal of these interventions is to keep disruptive students in their home schools, thereby minimizing out-of-school suspensions and referrals to disciplinary alternative schools (Ford, 2013; Hosley et al., 2009; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Reeder, 2005; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

Suspension Practices and Their Negative Consequences

Studies indicate that in school districts across the country, most students receive out-of-school suspensions for minor infractions of school rules rather than for dangerous or violent acts (New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Shah, 2012a; Losen, 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). According to Brunette (2010), the leading behaviors resulting in suspension are disobedience or defiance of authority, fighting, class disruption, non-compliance with discipline, and use of profanity. This means that the majority of students are exposed to the negative consequences of suspension simply for committing relatively minor disciplinary infractions.

Studies indicate that minority students are suspended at much higher rates than their White peers and are often punished more harshly for the same offenses (Hanover Research, 2014; Amurao, 2013; New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Losen, 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). According to Shah (2013), data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights for the 2009-2010 school year, including 85% of public school students nationwide, indicated that Black students were 3½ times more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students. Shah (2013) also cited an Education Week analysis of the same Office for Civil Rights data, showing that while Black students made up about 18% of students in the data set, they accounted for almost 50% of students suspended more than one time.

Researchers have found no evidence that the higher rate of suspension among Black students is due to higher rates of misbehavior (Hanover Research, 2014; Losen, 2011). Instead, studies have found that White students tend to be disciplined for more serious types of offenses (e.g., vandalism, drugs, and alcohol), while Black students are more likely to be disciplined for lesser offenses, such as disrespect and excessive noise (Shah, 2013; Skiba, 2000).

Studies indicate that suspensions are associated with the following adverse consequences:

- Students who are suspended suffer academically because of missed class time (Amurao, 2013; Ford, 2013; Shah, 2013; Losen, 2011).
- Many students feel stigmatized as a result of being forced out of school (Amurao, 2013; Ford, 2013).

- Suspended students are often put into situations in which there is no parental supervision, providing them with additional opportunities to commit delinquent acts (Amurao, 2013; National Association of School Psychologists, 2001).
- Students who have been suspended are more likely to be retained a grade, be suspended again, drop out of school, and become involved with the criminal justice system (Hanover Research, 2014; Amurao, 2013; New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Shah, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen, 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003).
- Schools with higher suspension rates have been found to have lower school-wide academic achievement and standardized test scores, even when controlling for factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status (New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011).
- Students and teachers report that high rates of suspension in a school make them feel less, not more, safe (New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013).

Placement of Disruptive Students in Disciplinary Alternative Schools

Because educational research has found a strong link between out-of-school suspension and a host of negative outcomes, an increasing number of school districts are placing disruptive students into disciplinary alternative schools. Disciplinary alternative schools have two primary goals: (1) to provide all students with a learning environment that is free from the threat of violence and disruption; and (2) to provide disruptive students with a separate learning environment that offers them a quality education and reengages them in the learning process (Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Losen, 2011; Schifano, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Hosley et al., 2009; Texas Education Agency, 2007).

The main advantages of disciplinary alternative schools are that they maintain students' academic involvement (as opposed to suspensions, which cause students to miss class time), help students develop the behavioral and social skills needed to succeed in traditional schools, and relieve pressure on teachers who have had difficulty handling disruptive students (Education Commission of the States, 2014; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.; Teach Safe Schools.org, n.d.).

There are several concerns related to the placement of disruptive students in disciplinary alternative schools. First, some experts maintain that many disciplinary alternative schools have become "dumping grounds" for problem students. They contend that the education students receive at these schools is not as rigorous as the education they would have received at their home schools (Glassett, 2012; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; McCargar, 2011; Aron, 2003).

Second, Booker and Mitchell (2011) noted a trend in which students are placed in disciplinary alternative schools for increasingly minor conduct violations and disruptive behaviors. Two studies of Texas students confirm this trend. Both studies found that the vast majority of students were not placed in disciplinary alternative schools because of serious offenses. Most students (97% in one study and 80% in the other study) had violated local school district codes of conduct, such as talking back to a teacher or chewing gum (Fabelo et al., 2011; Cortez &

Cortez, 2009). Cortez and Cortez (2009) concluded, "What used to be handled through classroom management is now being managed by removing and exiling students."

Finally, studies have documented that minority students are disproportionately placed in alternative schools (Shah, 2013; Izumi, 2012; Fabelo et al., 2011). For example, Vanderhaar and colleagues studied disciplinary alternative schools in Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools. They found that regardless of grade level, the odds of placement in a disciplinary alternative school were two times higher for minority students than White students. Poor minority students were most likely to be placed. Similarly, Booker and Mitchell (2011) studied a suburban school district in the Southwest and found that both Black and Hispanic students, but especially Hispanic students, were significantly more likely to be placed in a disciplinary alternative school than White students for discretionary reasons, such as disrespect or excessive noise.

Researchers have found that the following groups of students are also over-represented in disciplinary alternative schools:

- Low-income students;
- Special education students, particularly those diagnosed with Emotional Behavioral Difficulty;
- Students who scored below average on reading and mathematics tests;
- Students who repeated a grade level;
- Students who attended two or more different schools within the same year; and
- Students who were suspended in the past (Shah, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Chiang & Gill, 2010; Cortez & Cortez, 2009).

Research on the Effectiveness of Disciplinary Alternative Schools

Disciplinary alternative schools are promoted by educators as a promising strategy to reduce the number of school suspensions, ensure safety at traditional schools, and provide disruptive students with an environment that can more effectively address their needs. However, only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the impact of disciplinary alternative schools on students' behavior and academic achievement. These studies have reported mixed results and there is no consensus in the literature regarding the impact of disciplinary alternative schools on students' behavior and academic performance once they return to their home schools (Johnston, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Glassett, 2012; Atkins & Bartuska, 2010).

It should be noted that it is difficult to compare the effectiveness of disciplinary alternative schools because they serve diverse populations of students, have different program goals, and offer a wide variety of interventions (Johnston, 2013).

A review of the literature found the following results:

- One study found that an alternative school program had a positive impact on students' behavioral and academic outcomes:

Weissman and colleagues (2005) evaluated the Strategies for Success (SfS) program in the Syracuse City School District. Students who participated in the voluntary alternative education program were determined to be at high risk for

involvement in the criminal justice system. SfS included the following program elements: transitional planning services; after-school and youth development activities; family connections; and connections with other supportive adults, such as teachers and community mentors. The program provided social supports to seventh and eighth grade students while they were enrolled in the district's alternative schools and for six months after they returned to their home schools.

Students who successfully completed the SfS program demonstrated greater improvements in school behavior than a comparison group of students who were placed in alternative schools but never enrolled in the SfS program. SfS program completers had lower suspension rates, fewer reassignments to alternative schools, improved attendance, higher grade point averages (GPAs), and lower rates of criminal justice involvement. The researchers cautioned that despite these positive outcomes, SfS completers remained educationally at risk. Their attendance rates were still below the district average and their GPAs remained low.

- One study reported that placement in a disciplinary alternative school had a positive impact on student behavior, but not on academic performance:

Schifano (2011) evaluated a disciplinary alternative school program in a large suburban school district in the south. The program was established at three schools for elementary students who had a history of significant disruptive behavior. Program participants were compared to a group of students randomly selected from the school district's general population, matched on school, grade level, gender, and ethnicity.

Findings indicated that the program had a positive impact on student behavior, resulting in decreased disciplinary actions once students returned to their home schools. Students missed fewer days of instruction due to suspension following their participation in the program. However, they continued to have a higher rate of suspension than comparison group students. Students who participated in the program did not demonstrate significant improvements in their academic report card grades and continued to have lower grades than comparison group students. An unexpected finding was that there was no relation between students' level of success in the disciplinary alternative program and their academic or behavioral improvement once they returned to their home schools.

- Several studies found that disciplinary alternative schools did not have a positive impact on student behavior:
 - Reeder (2005) studied secondary students in Texas who were placed in a disciplinary alternative school. He compared their academic performance, behavioral infractions, and attendance rates prior to and following their placement in the alternative school. Results indicated that students' core course grades and attendance declined, and their behavioral infractions increased, once they returned to their home school. Over 11% of students dropped out of school and over 40% of students were reassigned to the alternative school within two semesters. The only variable that showed improvement was students' standardized test scores.

- A study of alternative schools in Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools found that students attending disciplinary alternative schools had a high likelihood of subsequent juvenile detention. Forty percent of students experienced juvenile detention at some point between their time at the alternative school and twelfth grade. The researchers suggested that placement in alternative schools may have increased, not reduced, juvenile detention rates (Vanderhaar et al., 2013).
- Warren (2007) examined California Department of Education records and found that dropout rates at alternative schools were significantly higher than those at traditional schools. Reported dropouts from alternative schools accounted for one-half of all California high school dropouts. In addition, dropout rates at alternative schools were 2½ times higher than the statewide dropout rate.
- Two studies suggested that the type of school disruptive students attended and the length of time they spent at the school influenced their academic and behavioral outcomes:
 - Moger (2010) compared the standardized test scores, grade point averages (GPAs), and attendance rates of at-risk students attending three different types of high schools in the same Texas school district: a traditional high school, an alternative school of choice, and a disciplinary alternative school (with mandatory placement). Findings indicated that standardized test scores increased regardless of the type of school a student attended, but GPAs tended to be higher in the alternative school of choice. Students who attended the traditional high school had higher attendance rates than students who attended either type of alternative school.
 - Chiang and Gill (2010) found that only 32% of School District of Philadelphia students attending disciplinary alternative schools returned to their home schools. Reentry rates were higher for students who attended disciplinary alternative schools for one year or less (44%) than for students who remained at alternative schools for more than one year (22%). The researchers also found that students who returned to their home schools were more likely to graduate than those who remained in disciplinary alternative schools.

Features of Effective Disciplinary Alternative Schools

While there is a great deal of variation among disciplinary alternative schools, studies have demonstrated that effective schools have a number of common features (Glassett, 2012; Development Services Group, 2010; Hinds, 2010; Quinn & Poirier, 2007). Following is a summary of program characteristics that researchers have concluded are critical to the success of disciplinary alternative schools.

- **Students are allowed to choose the alternative school they will attend.** Students typically do not choose to attend disciplinary alternative schools, but are sent to a specified school. Several researchers have suggested that when students are allowed to select the disciplinary alternative school they will attend, they are more likely to believe

that their time at the school will provide them with opportunities to succeed. This results in higher levels of investment in their performance at the school (McCargar, 2011; Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

- **Schools have strong leadership.** Research has found that leaders at successful disciplinary alternative schools support the vision and mission of their school; genuinely care about their students; listen to students, teachers, and parents; and effectively support their staff (Losen, 2011; Development Services Group, 2010; Quinn & Poirier, 2007).
- **School staff have high expectations for all students.** Studies have shown that it is essential for staff at disciplinary alternative schools to communicate to all students that they have high expectations for their social, emotional, behavioral, and academic growth (Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007).
- **Students' cultural needs are addressed.** Researchers have found that successful disciplinary alternative schools have culturally diverse staff who address the needs of students from various ethnic and income groups. Teachers understand the culture and background of the students they are serving and ensure that lesson plans are relevant to students' social and economic experiences (Izumi, 2012; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Aron, 2003; National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).
- **High quality academic instruction is offered.** Researchers suggest that instruction at disciplinary alternative schools should be student-centered, challenging, experiential, non-competitive, and relevant. Studies have found that successful disciplinary alternative schools use varied instructional approaches that accommodate students' different learning styles, such as self-paced, hands-on, and group-based instruction (Johnston, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Aron, 2003; Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001; Leone & Drakeford, 1999; Raywid, 1994; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).
- **Character education is incorporated into instruction.** Successful alternative schools help to develop students' character by teaching and instilling core values, such as responsibility and honesty. They teach students how to recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively. Studies have found that character education programs, in general, have a significant, positive impact on adjusting student behavior and reducing aggression and conduct problems across grade levels, ability levels, and ethnic groups (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Schifano, 2011; Jerald, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Aron, 2003; Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

- **Students receive social skills training.** Social skills instruction includes problem solving, conflict resolution, anger management, and empathy training. Researchers have found that many students exhibit less disruptive behavior and replace inappropriate behavior with positive behavior once they develop social competence (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Schifano, 2011; Development Services Group, 2010; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).
- **Discipline is enforced fairly and consistently.** Scholars have noted that the rules at exemplary alternative schools are enforced fairly, consistently, and respectfully (Hinds, 2010; Texas Education Agency, 2007).
- **The school has a small study body.** Researchers have found that when schools are small, they are more likely to be caring communities. Students attending small schools tend to have an increased sense of belonging and are provided with more opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships with staff (Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Glassett, 2012; Hinds, 2010; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007).
- **Classrooms have a low student-teacher ratio.** Researchers agree that low student-teacher ratios facilitate connections between teachers and students and allow for more one-to-one interactions. Recommendations regarding the number of students per teacher vary, typically ranging from 10 to 20 (Johnston, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Glassett, 2012; Development Services Group, 2010; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; National Association of School Psychologists, 2002; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).
- **Students develop positive relationships with their teachers.** Studies indicate that disciplinary alternative schools are most successful when students have positive, trusting, and caring relationships with their teachers. Strong relationships between students and teachers have been found to lead to improvements in student attendance and engagement. Teachers in effective disciplinary alternative schools take on multiple roles in addition to teacher, such as mentor, nurturer, and counselor (Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007).
- **Career development is emphasized.** In addition to basic skills, disciplinary alternative schools serving high school students should provide opportunities for students to learn about internships, jobs, and continuing education. Studies have found that the most successful alternative schools offer career awareness workshops, occupational exploration programs, apprenticeships, vocational/technical training, and modified work/study programs (Izumi, 2012; Hinds, 2010; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Warren, 2007; Aron, 2003).
- **Teachers receive extensive professional development.** Teachers in disciplinary alternative schools require unique skills beyond those required by teachers in traditional classrooms. In addition to providing challenging, relevant, and differentiated instruction, they must also deal with a variety of very difficult behavioral issues. Therefore,

researchers have concluded that specialized teacher training is critical to the functioning of effective disciplinary alternative schools. Teachers should receive training in areas such as classroom and discipline management, conflict resolution, anger management, and social skills development (Glassett, 2012; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

- **Parent involvement is encouraged.** Studies have found that the most effective disciplinary alternative schools have strong, collaborative relationships with parents. Staff at these schools engage in frequent communication with parents; conduct parent education programs and workshops, provided either at the school or in the community; and engage in activities designed to involve parents in their children's education. Programs should educate parents about the source of their children's negative behavior and help them reinforce the positive behaviors their children are learning in the alternative school (Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Hinds, 2010; Jerald, 2007; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; National Association of School Psychologists, 2002; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).
- **Schools partner with community agencies.** Studies have found that disciplinary alternative schools are more likely to have a positive impact on students when they view community agencies as valued partners. Schools should team with community agencies to help students gain access to a range of services outside of the school, including health services; employment, career, and vocational training; social services, such as psychologists and social workers; and family services (Schifano, 2011; Hinds, 2010; Jerald, 2007; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Warren, 2007; National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).
- **Students are provided with transition support.** Many students receive limited transition support when they return to their home schools because there is a lack of coordination and communication between the alternative school and the home school. As a result, students often return to the same conditions that contributed to their problems in the first place. Researchers have found that students are more likely to succeed upon return to their home schools when alternative schools and home schools work together to design interventions that help students transition back to their "regular" classrooms. Programs should be overseen by transition staff coordinators and include collection of data on student outcomes, regular communication between alternative schools and home schools, follow-up services provided by school counselors and social workers, and partnerships with community agencies (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Reeder, 2005; Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

School-wide Disciplinary Interventions to Reduce the Incidence of Disruptive Behavior: Minimizing Suspensions and Alternative School Placements

Some traditional schools choose to keep disruptive students in their home schools instead of suspending them or placing them at alternative schools. They promote practices aimed at early proactive intervention in an attempt to change problem behavior, instead of removing students from their schools and risking their disengagement with the learning process (Vanderhaar et al., 2013; Schifano, 2011; Dodge et al., 2006).

Successful disciplinary interventions at the elementary and middle school levels tend to focus on prevention and early intervention. Programs take a preventative approach by teaching young students how to manage their emotions, relationships, and schoolwork. At the high school level, disciplinary interventions usually provide students with support to address and manage their emotions and any difficulties they may be having (Hanover Research, 2014).

Following are several of the most popular practices schools use to retain disruptive students in home schools while still maintaining order and safety:

- **School-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).** PBIS is a data-driven approach to improving school learning environments. According to Koon (2013), the approach has been adopted by 9,000 schools in 44 states. PBIS consists of three different levels of intervention. The first level affects all students in an effort to move the school culture away from punishment of problem behavior toward encouragement of desired behavior. The second (classroom) level targets at-risk students and focuses on reducing problem behaviors. The third (individual) level uses individualized interventions to reduce problem behavior. A large body of research supports the PBIS program's ability to reduce suspensions, office referrals, and problem behaviors. Research also indicates that PBIS has the potential to positively impact student achievement (Hanover Research, 2014; Losen, 2011).
- **Restorative justice.** Originally used in the justice system and adapted for use in the school context, restorative justice is a set of principles and practices that promote respect, taking responsibility, and strengthening relationships. Although implementation varies from school to school, most restorative justice programs use mediation to find the cause of the disciplinary infraction and identify ways to rectify the offense. Relatively little research has been conducted to investigate the efficacy of restorative justice in schools, but early studies suggest it is associated with reduced levels of disciplinary infractions and suspensions (Hanover Research, 2014; New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Shah, 2012b).

One example of restorative justice is the peer jury. At the middle and senior high school level, students at some schools are given a choice when they misbehave – they can be suspended from school or they can be disciplined by their classmates. In peer court, students face a panel of classmates who have been trained to listen and interrogate. Students receive sentences that can include community service and additional academic assignments. Students have a limited time to finish their assigned tasks or else they are suspended (Shah, 2012b).

- **Social and emotional learning (SEL).** SEL builds students' social and emotional skills, promotes self-discipline, and encourages strong student-teacher bonds in an effort to prevent disciplinary infractions. The SEL curriculum teaches healthy emotional and behavioral responses both in and out of the classroom. The core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are taught in class, integrated into the curriculum, and demonstrated through teacher instructional practices. Outside of the classroom, program implementation includes school-wide community activities, home-school integration, and service learning. Research has linked SEL programs to fewer behavioral problems, decreased truancy and drug use, lower dropout rates, improved academic performance, and improved connection to school (Hanover Research, 2014; New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013). According to Hanover Research (2014), some version of SEL is implemented at 59% of American schools.
- **Student counseling.** Many schools use their psychologists, guidance counselors, and social workers to research and develop discipline policies and positive behavior training strategies that can be used during the regular school day with students who have behavioral problems. The effect of student counseling on chronic behavior problems has not been thoroughly evaluated, but it appears that when used alone (i.e., when not coupled with other disciplinary interventions), individual counseling may not be effective in decreasing disruptive behavior, particularly when that behavior is chronic (Johnston, 2013; New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Shah, 2013; Dodge et al., 2006; National Association of School Psychologists, 2001).
- **Family involvement.** Most researchers agree that successful school-wide disciplinary interventions include a home-school component. Studies suggest that parent management training and family therapy are effective in reducing a range of delinquent student behaviors. In parent management training, parents are taught techniques such as strategic use of praise, rewards, and time out, and they are given opportunities to discuss and practice these techniques. Ongoing consultations with parents are also provided. Family therapy provides parents with the skills and resources needed to solve their own family problems (Johnston, 2013; Dodge et al., 2006; National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Johnston (2013) noted that schools may choose to use these types of interventions for parents of students with chronic behavioral problems, but that less intensive interventions are adequate for most families.
- **Specialized teacher training.** Studies have found that schools are increasingly punishing students for behavior that experts consider to be within the normal range for children and adolescents. Researchers believe these higher rates of punishment are occurring because teachers have not been adequately trained in behavioral management and instructional strategies for students with behavioral issues. Research shows that student misbehavior can be prevented when teachers are trained to manage classrooms effectively. Specialized areas of training should include behavior management, anger management, conflict resolution, and mediation (Hanover

Research, 2014; Ford, 2013; Shah, 2013; Losen, 2011; Texas Education Agency, 2007; Dodge et al., 2006).

Summary

Studies have found that disruptive students have a negative influence on their classmates and teachers. Although most educators agree that disruptive students should be removed from the classroom, school districts across the country have adopted different disciplinary practices. Some districts choose to suspend disruptive students, but a host of negative consequences associated with out-of-school suspensions have led many school districts to seek other options, such as placement in disciplinary alternative schools or implementation of proactive, school-wide interventions.

The main advantages of disciplinary alternative schools are that they maintain students' academic involvement (as opposed to suspensions which cause students to miss class time), help students develop the behavioral and social skills needed to succeed in traditional schools, and relieve pressure on teachers who have had difficulty handling disruptive students. Although disciplinary alternative schools have advantages over suspension, they are not without their critics. Some researchers, for example, contend that disciplinary alternative schools do not provide a rigorous education and that they enroll a disproportionate number of minority, disadvantaged, and low-performing students.

Only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the impact of disciplinary alternative schools on students' behavior and academic performance once they return to their home schools. These studies have reported mixed results and there is no consensus in the literature regarding the impact of placement in disciplinary alternative schools on students' future behavior and achievement.

While there is a great deal of variation among disciplinary alternative schools, studies have demonstrated that effective schools have a number of common features. Program characteristics that researchers have concluded are critical to the success of disciplinary alternative schools include high quality academic instruction, character education, social skills training, low student-teacher ratio, parent and community involvement, and transition support.

Some traditional schools choose to keep disruptive students in their home schools instead of suspending them or placing them in alternative schools. School-wide practices designed to reduce the occurrence of disruptive behavior include school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports, restorative justice, social and emotional learning, and student and family counseling.

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