



Alternatives to Expulsion: Case Studies of Wisconsin School Districts

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Part One: Alternatives to Expulsion

Introduction

Wisconsin school districts, along with districts throughout the country, are focusing upon the need to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. There are many different beliefs about how to best reach this goal. One approach includes a “zero tolerance” philosophy, which can result in severe penalties being applied to a wide range of infractions with little consideration for unique circumstances. The “zero tolerance” approach often removes a student from school with the intended result of curtailing the offending behavior for that student and serving as an example for others. The intent is to provide a safer, more positive learning atmosphere for other students.

Research is showing, however, that “schools with higher rates of school suspension and expulsion appear to have *less* satisfactory ratings of school climate, less satisfactory school governance structures, and to spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary matters.” In addition, “Recent research indicates a negative relationship between the use of school suspension and expulsion and school-wide academic achievement, even when controlling for demographics such as socioeconomic status.” (*Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations*, A Report by the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, August, 2006.)

Some Wisconsin school districts are implementing strategies to address student discipline in ways that are achieving positive results. The following case studies are examples of school districts that are providing a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, and at the same time minimizing the number of expulsions. Not only do these strategies maintain a sound learning situation for all students, but they serve to keep those young people who might have been expelled connected to school and in a learning environment. All too often expelled students do not obtain a high school diploma, have few or no job skills, do not become contributing citizens, and instead, become a part of the justice system.

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF BELOIT

OVERVIEW

The Beloit School District is successfully implementing a First Offenders Program for students who violate the district's alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) policies. Fran Fruzen, the district's coordinator of safe and drug free schools, believes it is important to rethink the concept of "zero tolerance" and supports the findings of the American Psychological Association study cited in the Introduction of this document. Fruzen feels that the First Offenders Program, which was implemented as a result of new Board of Education policy, is not permissive nor is it a lowering of the tolerance of unacceptable behavior. It does, however, provide youth the opportunity to correct bad decisions that may happen only once in a lifetime.

First offenders of the ATOD policies participate in the district's Prime for Life education program, along with other support opportunities such as assessment and counseling. The educational course emphasizes risk assessment and reduction coupled with sound decision-making. Students learn about the many kinds of supports that are available in the district and the community that can assist them in making positive changes. Student behavioral progress is closely monitored through the Student Assistance Program. The vast majority of the students successfully comply with the program requirements and the rate of second offenders is very low.

While the primary focus of the First Offenders Program has been on students who violate ATOD policies, the Beloit School District is moving toward this type of program for other policy violations, such as those that are violence-related.

RESULTS

Beloit School District has reduced the annual number of expulsions from 117 in 2002-2003 to 36 in 2006-2007, a decrease of about 70%. This is the result of several strategies including the one described above. For the 2006-2007 school year, 53 Beloit students remained in school who might otherwise have been expelled. There has been at least a 90% success rate in students not committing a second or third ATOD offense, and a 90% reduction in expulsions for ATOD offenses. For school year 2007-2008, 92 students had ATODA violations that could have resulted in expulsion. Of this group, 81 students (88%) successfully completed the first offenders program and remained in school. To date, 100% of these students have not committed a second or third offense. District officials point out that the reduction in the number of expulsions has resulted in additional state aid that would otherwise have been lost.

Contact: Fran Fruzen, Coordinator of Safe and Drug Free Schools, at ffruzen@sdb.k12.wi.us.

GREEN BAY AREA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

Thirty-seven student expulsions in the 2001-2002 school year caused Green Bay school officials to begin examining other options for dealing with student behavioral issues. The district began to look at alternatives to expulsion because too many students were being “lost” over time. Expulsion was a process that often pushed students out the door forever.

The Green Bay School District has developed an abeyance option for students who commit an expellable offense. The student and parent(s)/guardian agree to a set of specifications in order that the expulsion be held in abeyance, including counseling from an outside agency with student follow-up on all recommendations of the counseling, and participating in the district’s alternative educational program. This program is designed to meet the student’s needs based upon his/her behavioral history. The goal of the program is to provide a structured, supportive, and therapeutic environment allowing the student to acquire the skills needed to successfully return to the regular school setting. If the student follows these requirements, demonstrates academic progress, and commits no other expellable offenses, the expulsion will not proceed. School officials also wanted to continue to maintain school safety and the abeyance program has helped to achieve that goal.

Each student’s program involves four areas of focus: academic, affective, vocational, and behavioral, as well as a community service component driven by the individual’s specific needs. The family intervention and involvement is important to the student’s success. The school social worker provides case management services for each student, as well as individual and small group counseling.

RESULTS

The Green Bay School District has decreased the annual number of expulsions from 37 in 2001-2002 to 14 in 2006-2007, and to only five students in 2007-08, a reduction of 86%. Students who might previously have been expelled are returning to their regular school setting after completing their agreed-upon program and following paths that lead to graduation. Middle and high school building administrators as well as parents are very positive about the abeyance program, which helps to insure a supportive learning environment for all students while assisting policy offenders with their need to grow, develop, and make better decisions. Parents feel a sense of relief that the young person won’t be expelled, and a sense of satisfaction with the program and the outcomes for the student.

Contact: Jerry Wieland, Executive Director of Special Education and Student Relations, at jwieland@greenbay.k12.wi.us.

HUDSON SCHOOL DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

In order to meet the needs of students committing expellable offenses in the Hudson School District, a pre-expulsion conference is conducted in lieu of a referral to the Board of Education for an expulsion hearing. During this conference, the student can agree to a number of conditions including:

- participation in an alcohol or other drug assessment/treatment,
- completion of a reflections worksheet,
- participation in a mental health assessment/counseling/therapy,
- meetings with the school social worker and prevention coordinator,
- participation in a community mentorship program,
- participation in at least one extracurricular program,
- consent to random, unannounced, supervised alcohol/drug tests as requested by the school administration, and searches of personal belongings brought to school,
- development of a plan of success: academic, physical, emotional, and social,
- development of a plan of community service,
- participation in Youth Services Bureau Programs, and
- restitution and apology.

RESULTS

The Hudson School District utilizes this type of programming to reduce the number of students referred to the school board for expulsion. In 2006-2007, of the 38 students committing expellable offenses, only 14 were sent to the school board, and of that number, only 11 were expelled. Almost all of those students who are not referred to the school board for expulsion fulfill the requirements as outlined above and are never seen at a pre-expulsion conference again. In the event that a student fails to fulfill the administration's requirements, he/she is referred to the school board and recommended for expulsion. There were no such students during the 2006-2007 school year. In the 12 school years prior to 2006-2007, 41% of all of the students who could have been expelled were expelled. In 2006-2007, only 29% of the students eligible for expulsion were actually expelled.

In 2007-08, of the 39 students who had committed expellable offenses, 11 went before the Board of Education for an expulsion hearing. All 11 were expelled for varying amounts of time. Therefore, 28% of the students who could have been expelled were expelled. Thus, to date, 15% of the students who could have been expelled were expelled by the board, some for less than a semester and others for the remainder of their school career.

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SCHOOL DISTRICT OF JANESVILLE

OVERVIEW

The Janesville School District provides a “second chance” program for students whereby the Independent Hearing Officer holds an expulsion in abeyance, allowing the student to return to school under conditions of continuance. These students have certain conditions that they need to meet, such as an alcohol or other drug assessment.

In placing a very high priority on reconnecting students to staff and school, Janesville has started three new programs. Capturing Kids Hearts is offered at two of the district’s comprehensive high schools and three charter schools, one middle school, and one elementary school. The program provides a process for connecting students to staff in a positive and healthy way. Link Crew is a program designed to connect incoming freshmen to juniors and seniors in their high schools. The minority-led mentoring program is for male students at both comprehensive high schools.

Janesville has established three more charter schools this year in order to provide different kinds of learning environments to meet the academic and social/emotional needs of students, recognizing that one size does not fit all. The TAGOS Leadership Academy (Tailoring Academics to Guide Our Students) is for those who are not meeting their full potential. The Virtual Academy is designed for students who prefer to learn online and primarily at home. Finally, the CRES Academy (Community, Recovery, Education, and Service) provides a small, recovery-oriented environment for students returning from alcohol and other drug treatment. In addition, two district diversity specialists, funded through grant dollars, are working with students and parents of color, seeking solutions to the high suspension and expulsion rates of minority youth.

While many of the programs described above are designed to prevent students from committing expellable offenses by connecting them to school and supporting those who need “a second chance,” some of the components, such as the TAGOS Academy and the TATE program (Truancy Abatement and Transitional Education), work directly with expelled students.

A task force consisting of school personnel and community members studied expulsions in the district with some of the group’s recommendations resulting in the development of the programs described above. The District Diversity Committee and the Disproportionality Committee have been formed as a follow-up to the expulsion study. A newly developed book club made up of administrators has been formed to read and discuss professional literature that will impact the expulsion issue.

RESULTS

As a result of these efforts, Janesville is lowering the number of expulsions in the district. In 2007-2008, 43 students were expelled, compared with 51 in 2006-2007 and 58 in 2005-2006. This is a 26% reduction. In 2007-2008, 85 students were recommended for expulsion. Along with the 43 students who were expelled in 2007-2008, 24 students were offered “a second chance,” and, of those 24 students, one has been expelled and 11 students remain under a condition of continuance.

Contact: Karen Z. Schulte, Director of Student Services, at kschulte@janesville.k12.wi.us.

OSHKOSH AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

The Oshkosh Area School District received four years of grant funding from DPI to begin implementing a restorative justice program. Students who commit a variety of offenses along with the victims, their families, and community representatives are able to be directly involved in addressing the wrongdoing. All have an active role to play in the process. Restorative justice provides an opportunity for:

- support and justice for the victim,
- a focus on solving problems and repairing harm rather than punishment,
- the offender to repair the harm,
- the respectful treatment of everyone at all times,
- accepting responsibility for one's actions,
- changing behaviors rather than creating anger, and
- supporting positive behavioral decision-making.

Restorative justice provides another tool for schools and parents to address such actions as conflicts between students, tardiness and truancy, bullying and harassment, and vandalism, thus repairing harm and teaching problem-solving skills. Some of the strategies used to implement restorative justice include mediation, classroom community circles, and circle conferences, which are used to bring together the various parties involved so that discussion can lead to conflict resolution. Morning meetings are used to teach and practice restorative justice principles.

The Oshkosh School District website provides more details about this program as well as numerous tools and resources that may be helpful to those wishing to implement restorative justice programs in their schools.

RESULTS

Oshkosh Area School District has maintained a low expulsion rate, approximately two-thirds of the statewide average. According to the school district website, "Restorative justice provides a high level of support and control so everyone can learn to solve problems on their own in positive and caring ways." Through the use of the restorative justice strategies, students who commit an expellable offense may be able to avoid expulsion and continue to learn and to grow in making better behavioral choices. Students, offenders, and victims, who are able to address problems in a supportive learning environment, are more likely to feel connected to school and thus enjoy academic and personal/social success. District personnel believe these same students will continue to thrive in school and ultimately achieve high school graduation and post-secondary success.

CONTACT: Christine Fabian, Principal, Merrill Middle School,
christine.fabian@oshkosh.k12.wi.us.

STOUGHTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

The Stoughton Area School District adopted a policy change in 2004 which implemented a pre-expulsion conference that allows for an expulsion to be held in abeyance if certain conditions are met by the offending student and his/her parent/guardian.

The pre-expulsion conference is conducted by the superintendent or his/her designee. The student and the parent/guardian are given the opportunity to avoid expulsion and establish a re-entry plan. Minimum components to the plan include:

- a community-based assessment, e.g., alcohol or other drug, anger management, threat,
- a demonstration of compliance with the assessment,
- successful completion of any classes or treatment, as recommended by the assessment,
- submission to mandatory, unannounced drug screens as requested by the principal (for alcohol and other drug violations only),
- remaining on school grounds throughout the entire school day, including closed campus lunch,
- attending all classes,
- following school rules, as deemed necessary by a student behavior plan,
- having on-school parking privileges revoked, and
- avoidance of any similar misconduct for the remainder of his/her enrollment in the district.

The student and parent/guardian must assume the cost of any assessments, treatment, classes, and drug screens.

The original expulsion process is brought forward to the Board of Education for an expulsion hearing if one or more of the conditions as described above is not met. Conversely, any notation of the pre-expulsion conference and conditions are expunged from the student's records if he/she does not violate the conditions of the pre-expulsion conference during the remainder of his/her Stoughton school experience.

RESULTS

Stoughton Area School District has reduced the annual number of expulsions from six in 2001-2002 to one or zero in each of 2005-2008, a reduction of at least 83%. Since this policy was implemented in 2004, expulsions have dropped significantly.

Contact: Dr. Mary Gavigan, Superintendent, at admin@stoughton.k12.wi.us.

Part Two: Educational Services for Expelled Students

In 2001, DPI published a document, “Offering Educational Services to Expelled Students in Wisconsin” which is available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/postexpul.html>. It presented information about school districts and others providing educational services to expelled students, along with expulsion trends, policy, and practice related to student discipline leading to expulsion. The sites included Appleton Area School District, CESA 1, Eau Claire Area School District, Holmen School District, Ladysmith-Hawkins School District, Menominee Indian School District, Milwaukee Public Schools, and the Wausau Storefront private school. The following summarizes current offerings of those sites, and provides conclusions and their thoughts on program improvement.

Appleton Area School District: Three Options

Appleton Area School District holds the expulsion process in abeyance and has parents sign a withdrawal agreement in order for the student to meet certain conditions, such as participation in AODA services, in order to apply for admittance to one of the alternative programs, and early re-admittance to the home school. The district offers three options: Dan Spalding Academy, with after school access to alternative school staff and curriculum, eSchool virtual high school, and an interim alternative educational setting where students with an Individual Educational Plan may be placed.

For more information contact: Judy Baseman, (920) 997-1471, basemanjudy@aad.k12.wi.us.

CESA 1: Four Alternative Schools

Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 1 operates four alternative high schools, educating about 240 students from Milwaukee and school districts in an adjoining county. Individualized instruction using computer software is the primary mode of instruction. Each cohort consists of 20 students who attend a half-day of school. Participating school districts negotiate a contract and pay a per pupil fee. The students work on achieving measurable competencies. The home school district awards the credits and diplomas. The teachers are employees of the CESA.

For more information contact: [Barb Van Haren](mailto:bvanharen@cesal.k12.wi.us), (262) 787-9545, bvanharen@cesal.k12.wi.us.

Ladysmith-Hawkins: Day Program

Ladysmith-Hawkins operates a program during the day, which meets off site twice a week. New to the district is the GED Option #2 program for high school completion. The GED Option #2 (GEDO #2) program allows authorized school districts to use the GED test battery to measure proficiency in lieu of high school credit for students enrolled in an alternative education program. A student who passes the GED tests and completes the other requirements for graduation is entitled to the traditional high school diploma. Wisconsin received approval to offer this opportunity to local school districts as part of its waiver application to GED Testing Service.

For more information contact: Jackie Pederson, (715) 532-5277, jpederson@lhsd.k12.wi.us.

Eau Claire McKinley Charter School

Approximately 12 years ago, the Eau Claire School District opened the McKinley Charter School as part of a continuum of services designed to help students achieve success. The program relies on community support, as many students in the program require mental health services, foster care, and drug and other alcohol abuse treatment. The McKinley Charter School served over 1,000 students in 2007-08. The McKinley Charter School provides outreach services to incarcerated students, educational services for homeless students, basic competency education and skills for students who are severely credit deficient. It also provides the option for early reinstatement following expulsion which reconnects students to curriculum with a chance to move forward well before they otherwise would have, had they served the full term of expulsion. In addition to McKinley, the district operates multiple programs for at-risk students, and an alternative school in collaboration with CESA 10 and the Chippewa Valley Technical College.

For more information contact: Peter Riley, McKinley Charter School Head of Instruction, (715) 852-6901, priley@ecasd.k12.wi.us.

Holmen's Multi-Services Plan for Expelled Students

The School District of Holmen has few expulsions, with a range of zero to two a year. Post-expulsion services are offered to all expelled students with funding provided by the school district. Post-expulsion services are provided through a combination of school and community personnel. Many staff and agencies may be involved with one student. School personnel coordinate services with counselors, administrators, and community agency representatives, including police liaisons, tutors, treatment program professionals, and other parties/agencies involved with the expelled student. In some instances, school personnel provide and implement curriculum, including tutorial services (similar to homebound) at a public location. If the student is employed, a teacher from the school district may act as a job coach, keeping in contact with the job site. The student can receive credit if the school's policies and guidelines are followed. If a parent chooses to home-school their child, the school offers curriculum material. Other services provided via community agencies include counseling, police liaison transportation (for violent students), elective credit for treatment programs, and high school equivalency diploma (HSED) preparation at the local technical college. An alternative placement in other school districts or in a private agency's school has been used when deemed appropriate.

For more information contact: Kathy Mulliner, (608) 526-1368, mulkat@holmen.k12.wi.us.

Menominee Indian School District: Community and Tribal Support for Expelled Students

Both Menominee Indian School District policy and tribal law require that services be provided for all expelled students. These services are designed to keep students connected to the school and curriculum. Within the special education department, the emphasis is to provide continuing services to students identified with disabilities, as mandated by state and federal law. There are many prevention and intervention strategies employed by the district prior to expulsion, such as credit recovery, AODA cadre, mentoring, and Collaboration for Kids. The district administrator conducts a student-parent conference to determine if other means might be used to change

student behavior. Remedies in lieu of expulsion may include community service, short-term suspension with a behavior intervention plan, or other forms of in-school interventions.

If a student is expelled, a continuum of services and programs are offered, including tutorial services in either a home-bound setting or at an off-campus site under a Memorandum of Understanding. Students may also attend one of the North Central Technical College campuses through a contractual arrangement with the district. The after-school GED program is another option, with completers receiving a high school diploma. The tribal and county human services agencies provide services to address other social and emotional issues of the student and family.

For more information contact: Dan Hinkfuss, (715) 799-3828, Ext 5014, dhink@misd.k12.wi.us.

Milwaukee Public Schools: School and Community Services for Expelled Students

Milwaukee Public School's policy is to recommend educational services for all expelled students who commit nonviolent offenses, such as possession of drugs. The current policy is to recommend expulsion for possession of 0.5 grams or more of marijuana, and provide an administrative hearing and transfer to a partnership school for lesser amounts. During the 2007-2008 school year, the district offered an alternative for some of the 1,053 students referred for possible expulsion. The district assigned 663 students to another school rather than recommend a hearing for expulsion. Of the 390 students expelled, 288 (74%) received services and were assigned to one of the MPS alternative or partnership schools. Services at these sites include academic instruction to earn units or credits toward high school graduation or grade completion, and support services related to the reason(s) for the expulsion. Support services include anger management groups and counseling for drug and alcohol issues and responsible decision-making.

For more information contact: Jennie Dorsey, (414) 475-8027, dorseyjb@milwaukee.k12.wi.us.

Wausau Area: Community-Based Storefront Alternative School

Wausau area school districts may refer expelled and other students to a private school, the Storefront Alternative Learning Center. At-risk youth, special education (LD, ED) students, and those under expulsion orders are accepted. Referrals also come from social services, juvenile court, and by student self-referrals. The Storefront Alternative Learning Center contracts with Wausau area school districts for six slots at \$3,000 each to pay tuition. Most students attend from their sophomore through their senior year. They formally withdraw from their home schools and enroll in the Storefront. Three full-time staff and a part-time secretary work with about 30 students. Of those, one or two are expelled students.

For more information contact: Mary Jaax, (715) 842-7556, Storefront@g2a.net.

Conclusions and Recommendations Regarding Case Studies on Educational Services for Expelled Students

All of the sites identified in 2001 sustained, and in several cases expanded, activities to provide services to expelled students in 2008. Several expanded offerings in new sites made use of virtual school technology, and increasingly targeted efforts within at-risk populations to serve more expelled students. Alternative program leaders identified the following areas for improvement: more diverse and expanded funding; additional community mental health and social services; and securing staff, including student services staff such as school social workers, school psychologists, and trained Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse counselors.