

RB0079

# **Focus on Suspension**

**A Resource  
for  
Schools**



**BRITISH  
COLUMBIA**

**Ministry of Education  
Special Programs Branch**

FOCUS ON SUSPENSION  
A Resource for Schools

**Ministry of Education**  
Special Programs Branch  
1999

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# INTRODUCTION

The BC Safe Schools Initiative began in the 1997/98 school year as a joint project of the Ministries of Education and Attorney General. The Safe School Centre in Burnaby was established to help coordinate the combined efforts of the two Ministries and communities across the province. The initiative's activities include providing support for:

- school-linked services
- community programs, and
- resources aimed at enhancing safe and healthy school environments through:
  - support for students' mental, emotional, and social development
  - increased awareness and skill development around student safety, anti-violence, anti-racism, and pro-social skills
  - respect for cultural diversity, and
  - prevention programs on specific topics of concern to students (e.g., youth violence and crime in schools and communities, youth leadership, anti-racism, anti-discrimination, bully-proofing schools, creating safe school climates, peer mediation, peer counselling, and multicultural awareness).

*Traditional discipline techniques may no longer be sufficient for managing behaviour in today's schools.*

*Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools* is one of these resources for educators. It is designed to raise awareness about and skills for creating safe and healthy school environments.

## Rationale

Schools in B.C. and around North America are facing the challenge of carrying out effective discipline programs. School staff report that managing problem behaviour—in particular violence—is a growing problem in both the classroom and other parts of the school environment. Traditional discipline techniques may no longer be sufficient for managing behaviour in today's schools.

One of the most commonly used disciplinary measures for dealing with problem behaviour in schools has been suspension. With the



change in nature of behaviour problems in today's children and youth and the changing structure of families and communities, out-of-school suspension as a discipline measure may not have the same effect as it once had. Rather than reducing the problem behaviour, suspension may in some situations have no effect or even increase the likelihood of the behaviour recurring.

One of the goals of the education system in B.C. is for all students to graduate from secondary school. Studies of students who have left school before completion show that academic failure and alienation from the school are major factors in leaving school. Out-of-school suspension can contribute to a student's alienation from school and the likelihood of the student dropping out. Absence from school, including days off school because of suspension, is one of the major contributors to academic failure. Suspension also appears to be a factor in students getting involved in risky or anti-social behaviour.

Repeated suspensions may in fact precipitate more serious crises in the lives of students, with resulting effects in the community. Schools are faced with the need to:

- create school climates that focus on preventing the behaviours that result in school suspensions
- provide alternatives to suspensions that help students change their problem behaviours, and
- set up follow-up interventions so that when suspension is the appropriate discipline strategy, students do not become alienated from the school community.

Behaviours that might result in assigning the consequence of school suspension should be regarded as an indication of underlying problems, and the school should respond with a helpful, supportive strategy for addressing them.

## Purpose of the resource

*Focus on School Suspension: A Resource for Schools* is intended to assist schools in developing strategies that focus on alternatives to out-of-school suspension. It includes suggestions for prevention and intervention strategies, and information on programs for improving school-wide and classroom behaviour. It also contains information on:

- the legal issues around suspension

*In some cases, children and youth with severe behaviour problems were expelled from school. This was yet another rejection for children who were already socially unattached. The results of this final withdrawal of supports and community in some situations was devastating.*

—from Children's Commissioner Cynthia Morton's *Report to the Attorney General*, recommendations from the review of child fatalities, 1997

- successful discipline and support interventions as alternatives to suspension, and
- the importance of a positive healthy school climate and effective classroom management in preventing situations that may result in the necessary use of suspension.

The resource includes examples of programs and practices from around the province and in the literature on discipline. Recommendations for making suspensions more effective in teaching appropriate behaviour are also provided.

The suggestions in this resource should be read in the context of locally developed discipline policies and procedures in schools and school districts. The information included in the resource may be useful when these policies and procedures are being reviewed and revised. The content is intended to enrich systems approaches to discipline in schools.



### **Suspension and the B.C. *School Act***

It is important to understand the legislative context of school suspension. School boards, superintendents, and principals are faced with the task of establishing systems of discipline in school districts and schools in keeping with the *School Act*. School boards in B.C. have the authority, but not necessarily the obligation, to establish local procedures for school discipline and suspension.

The discipline of a student while attending an educational program made available by a board or a Provincial school must be similar to that of a kind, firm and judicious parent, but must not include corporal punishment. (s. 76(3))

In B.C., when students under the age of 16 are suspended, the school still has an obligation to provide an educational program. The nature and extent of that program may vary according to local decisions and policies, but access to an educational program is guaranteed.

. . . a board has the power and capacity to make rules establishing a code of conduct for students attending educational programs operated by or on behalf of the board [and] respecting suspension of students and the provision of educational programs for suspended students . . . so long as the board continues to make available to those students an educational program. . . (s. 85 (2) (c) (i, ii), (d))

The *School Act* gives administrative officers (including principals) the authority to suspend students.

An administrative officer of a school or the superintendent of schools may suspend a student of the school if the rules made under s. 85 (2) (c) by the board operating the school do not provide otherwise, and the suspension is carried out in accordance with those rules. (s. 26 (a), (b))

*The School Act gives administrative officers the authority to suspend students.*

The administrative officer's responsibilities as stated in the *School Regulations* include administering and supervising the school, and specifically student conduct while at school or during school activities off school sites. (This does not include behaviour of the student in the community when the student is not under the supervision of the school.)

. . . the general conduct of students, both on school premises and during activities that are off school premises and that are organized or sponsored by the school and shall, in accordance with the policies of the board, exercise paramount authority within the school in matters concerning the discipline of students. (B.C. Reg. 281/98, s. 7 (g))

The duties of students regarding behaviour are outlined in the *School Act* as well:

A student must comply with the school rules authorized by the principal of the school . . . attended by the student, and with the code of conduct and other rules and policies of the board . . . . (s. 6 (1) (a) (b))

### **Students over the age of 16**

School boards in B.C. have the authority to refuse to serve students over the age of 16.

. . . despite any other provision of this Act, a board may refuse to offer an educational program to a student 16 years of age or older if that student has refused to comply with the code of conduct, other rules and policies referred to in s. 6 [duties of students above] or has failed to apply himself or herself to his or her studies. (s. 85 (3))

### **Removal from school for health reasons**

Sometimes students are removed from school but not suspended. Students can be excluded from the school for health reasons. Each school district has a physician, referred to in the Act as the "school medical officer for the district," who is appointed by the Minister of

Health. This physician makes reports to the board on students' health, on which the board is required to act promptly:

If the school medical officer considers that the health condition of any student is such as to endanger the health or welfare of the students of the school or the employees of the board, the school medical officer must so report to the board, giving the name of the student concerned. The board must promptly act on a report under subsection (2) and must remove from school a student whose health condition is reported by the school medical officer as being dangerous. A student who is removed from a school under subsection (3) must not be permitted to return to the school until he or she delivers to the board a certificate signed by the school medical officer permitting the student to return to the school. (s. 91 (4))

The act also gives school staff the authority to exclude a student because of health issues:

If a teacher or administrative officer suspects a student is suffering from a communicable disease or other physical, mental or emotional condition that would endanger the health or welfare of the other students, the teacher or the administrative officer must report the matter to the school medical officer, to the school principal and to the superintendent of schools for the district and may exclude the student from school until a certificate is obtained for the student from the school medical officer or a private medical practitioner permitting the student to return to the school. (s. 91 (5) (a) (b))

If a student is removed or excluded from school under subsection (3) or (5), the board must continue to make available an educational program for that student. (s. 91 (6))

### **Accessibility and relevance concerns**

Conflicting values frequently surface when school suspension is being considered. School administrators have a responsibility to ensure that the school community is a safe and orderly place for learners and educa-

tors. At the same time, the foundation of education policy is that all students of school age in B.C. are entitled to enroll in an educational program.

While there is no easy resolution to this conflict in values, educators need to be mindful of them and should approach the school's response to student misbehaviour thoughtfully.

Students who are suspended from school may be learners whose needs are not being met by the education programs currently available to them. Students who are unable or unwilling to follow the code of conduct for a school or district may in fact be students with unmet psychological, emotional, or education needs. When these students are suspended, the school's response to inappropriate behaviour or effort may be at odds with the province's mandate for education. Two of B.C.'s five official Attributes of the Public School System are particularly relevant to out-of-school suspension:



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Attributes of the Public School System, B.C. Order in Council 1290/89 (1989)

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Michael E. Bernard, *You Can Do It: Leader's Guide* (Tampa, Fla.: Education, Inc., 1994).

- Accessibility—a variety of programs are available in the province to meet the full range of student needs.
- Relevance—programs are current, and relevant to the needs of the learner.

A school's response that includes multiple suspensions or denial of access to a full-time educational program raises serious questions:

- Do the available education programs meet the full range of student needs?
- Are suspended students being removed from instruction because of a special need that can be met but is not being met?
- Can the school system realistically provide an appropriate educational program for a student with behavioural needs when the student is suspended from attending school?

Researchers have been reporting since the 1970s that students who lack essential interpersonal skills, thinking skills, and decision-making skills are more likely to have problems with behaviour in school and interpersonal relationships in the school community. These essential skills cannot be addressed adequately when the student experiences lengthy or repeated suspensions from the school setting.

## Protecting school employees from violence

Aggressive student behaviour may put school staff at risk of physical harm. If employees of the board of education are at risk because a student behaves violently, the incident may be deemed workplace violence. Under Workers' Compensation Regulation 8.94, it is the duty of the employer to:

- know the “nature and extent” of the risk
- inform employees of risk, and
- respond to potential violence with a plan to eliminate or reduce the risk.

Since B.C.'s legislation recognizes violence in a school as a workplace hazard, school boards must ensure that schools take action to plan for potential violence. This may mean that the principal or superintendent considers suspending a student to ensure employee safety. However, this does not mean that students must automatically be subject to out-of-school suspension.

### Safety plans

Safety plans with emergency response components can be developed in order to reduce the risk to employees. Risk assessments and plans to reduce those risks can be carried out and appropriate action can be taken to ensure that staff are prepared for potential violence. Specialized training in managing students whose behaviour may become physically aggressive can be provided to ensure that teachers and other school employees are safe.

### Safety and students with special needs

Some students with special needs present particular challenges because of the nature of their disabilities. Poor impulse control is a common problem among students with some kinds of behaviour disorders or other disabilities. Students with severe needs may act in violent ways because of those needs. Careful planning for the safety of staff and students should be part of the development of these students' Individual Education Plans.

*“ . . . a workplace violence prevention program provides consistency, uniformity, and safer schools for everyone: educators, other staff, and students.”*

*“Your risk assessment will help . . . develop a proactive workplace violence prevention program, including a range of prevention measures and responses to potential or actual violence. Your program should:*

*establish codes of conduct, and help students learn alternative ways of behaving through programs such as Effective Behaviour Support (EBS) and conflict resolution.”*

—from *Keeping Teachers Safe*, a video developed by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), 1998



**For more information on planning a safe school, consult the BC Safe School Centre's resource, *BC Safe School Planning Guide*. This guide is available from the Safe Schools Centre. To obtain a copy of the guide or a list of other resources available on loan through the centre, call 1-888-224-SAFE (1-888-224-7233).**





## Factors Influencing the Use of Suspension

### Factors associated with suspension

The literature on school suspension reveals some interesting trends. One study by the Toronto Board of Education identified five factors most often associated with students who are suspended:

- history of poor behaviour
- academic achievement below grade level
- repetition of a grade at some point in schooling
- attendance at multiple schools (an average of over four for each student)
- attending schools that have high rates of suspension.

These factors are not surprising. It appears that a combination of learning difficulties and moving from school to school is significant, probably contributing to increased frustration and alienation. Students need a sense of success and belonging. Schools vary widely in their use of suspension practices. Some tend to retain students and use other strategies; others tend to rely heavily on suspension. A student who enrolls in a school that has a history of responding to student misbehaviour with suspension is more likely to be suspended.

The study also identified some qualities associated with schools that have lower-than-average suspension rates:

- positive school climate
- lack of apathy—enthusiastic staff and students
- positive image of students in the eyes of staff
- decentralization of disciplinary decision making
- high level of student participation in school activities



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Jo Openheimer and  
Suzanne Ziegler,  
*Suspension, Alternatives  
to Suspension and Other  
Approaches to Discipline*  
(Toronto, Ont.: Toronto  
Board of Education  
Research Services, 1988).

- pro-active/preventive discipline approach rather than punishment orientation
- clearly defined discipline policy with clear consequences for breaking the code of conduct
- high parental involvement
- staff participation in curriculum design (in the language of the B.C. *School Act*, this would say educational program design)
- screening of students to ensure that educational programs are appropriate to interests, abilities, and learning styles.

Interestingly, location or age of the school facility, staff experience, and class size were among the factors that did not prove to be relevant.

### Reasons for using suspension



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Louis Rosen, "Wanted: Alternatives to suspension and expulsion," *School Safety Journal* (Fall 1997): 8–11.

A recent California study found that school suspension and expulsion are used mainly to reinforce the authority of those responsible for control in school and to maintain the health and safety of both teachers and students. The study identified the top 10 reasons for using suspension, which were, in the following order:

1. defiance of authority
2. failing to attend assigned detentions or other consequences
3. disruptive behaviour
4. attendance or tardiness problems
5. fighting
6. swearing
7. vandalizing school property
8. violating dress codes (in California this often means wearing gang "colours")
9. theft
10. leaving school without permission

In 1997, an extensive survey was conducted in the United States to determine school principals' perceptions of discipline issues in schools. The three student behaviour problems cited most commonly by principals as serious in their schools were:

1. student tardiness (by 40% of principals)
2. absenteeism or skipping classes ( by 25% of principals)
3. physical conflict among students (by 21% of principals).




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National Center for Educational Statistics,  
U.S. Department of Education,  
Education,  
*Principals/School Disciplinary Survey on School Violence*  
(Washington, DC: Fast Response Survey System, 63, 1997).

### **B.C. data on the use of suspension**

In 1998, the University of British Columbia conducted a study of discipline practices across the province. Preliminary results from a snapshot of practices in the 38% of the province's schools that responded to the survey suggest that elementary schools use suspension less often than secondary schools and alternate schools. It should be noted that alternate schools typically serve students who have already demonstrated academic or behavioural difficulties. Results of the study included:

#### **In-school suspensions**

- Over the 557 schools, a total of 1340 students were reported to have received in-school suspensions during the month of January 1998.
- Of the 557 schools:
  - 38% reported that no students received in-school suspensions during January 1998
  - 35% reported that 1–2 students were in-school suspended
  - 25% reported that 3–14 students were in-school suspended
  - 5% of schools reported 10 or more in-school suspensions
  - 2% (14 schools) reported 15–88 students were in-school suspended.

### Out-of-school suspensions

- Over the 556 schools, a total of 1072 students were reported to have received out-of-school suspensions during January 1998.
- Of the 556 schools:
  - 52% reported that no students received out-of-school suspensions in January 1998
  - 25% reported that 1–2 students were suspended
  - 21% reported that 3–13 students were suspended
  - 4% of schools reported 10 or more out-of-school suspensions
  - 2% (12 schools) reported 14–35 students were suspended.

### Medical exclusion for behaviour

*Seventy-six percent indicated that they used medical exclusion for behaviour.*

- Over the 486 schools, a total of 149 students were reported to have been medically excluded for behaviour problems in the 1996/97 school year.
- Of the 486 schools:
  - 84% reported that no students received medical exclusions for behaviour problems in the 1996/97 school year
  - 12% reported that 1–2 students received medical exclusions for behaviour problems
  - 4% (18 schools) reported 3–11 students were medically excluded
  - only one school (<1%) reported 10 or more medical exclusions in 1996/97.

### Expulsion

- Over the 510 schools, a total of 1266 students were reported to have been expelled for behaviour problems in the 1996/97 school year.
- Of the 510 schools:
  - 68% reported that no students were expelled for behaviour problems in the 1996/97 school year
  - 15% reported that 1–2 students were expelled
  - 15% reported 3–15 students were expelled
  - 4% of schools reported 10 or more expulsions
  - 2% (12 schools) reported 18–60 students were expelled in 1996/97 school year.

### Referrals for community mental health services

- Over the 518 schools, a total of 1935 students were reported to have been referred to community mental services in the 1996/97 school year.
- Of the 518 schools:
  - 28% reported no referrals in the 1996/97 school year
  - 33% reported 1–2 referrals
  - 37% reported 3–20 referrals
  - 8% of schools reported 10 or more referrals
  - 2% (14 schools) reported 25–85 referrals in the 1996/97 school year.



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P. Mirenda and W. McKee, *A Survey of Discipline Policies and Practices in BC Schools*, manuscript in preparation, University of British Columbia, 1999.



# CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION AND EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP AFTER SUSPENSION

## **Suspension and instructional discipline**

B.C.'s Goals of Education state that the primary goal of the school system is to support the intellectual development of students, with the support of families and the community. The goals also state that schools, families, and the community share the responsibility for enabling students to achieve the goals of human and social development and career development.

Discipline measures that we use with students should be viewed in this context—as helping students achieve intellectual and social development. The purpose of suspension, or any other discipline strategy, should be to meet these provincial goals and to develop self-reliant adults.

There is a significant difference between discipline strategies that are pro-active and designed to increase social development and those which are reactive and designed primarily as punishment for misbehaviour. Effective discipline practices focus on teaching social responsibility and appropriate behaviour, not on demanding arbitrary obedience or exerting external control.

Discipline strategies that serve only as punishment without an instructional component have not been shown to decrease inappropriate behaviour over time. Punishment can also have negative side effects, even when it seems to decrease the particular behaviour for which the student was suspended. Used by itself, it does not usually change the circumstances that precipitated the misbehaviour.

## **Helpful aspects of suspension as a discipline strategy**

Suspension is one strategy in a more complex problem-solving process designed to support the student in changing inappropriate behaviour. Used judiciously, suspension can have positive effects, including:

- ensuring safety for everyone in the school community
- assigning clear consequences for a range of inappropriate behaviours



- providing the time for planning support for behaviour change
- promoting collaboration among family, school, and other community services to solve problems.

*In 1997, the Children's Commissioner made recommendations concerning policy about the use of suspension, including:*

*That the Ministry [of Education] review its current policy governing out-of-school suspensions to determine how such actions can be used to support the best interests of the subject student.*

Most school trustees, superintendents, principals, and teachers recognize that suspension is sometimes a necessary and appropriate strategy. Although discipline should be considered in its instructional context, safety for all students and staff is also of paramount importance. Schools must take action to guarantee safety for everyone in the school community. Sometimes, suspending a student is the appropriate action to take in order to make a school safe. In dealing with discipline measures, administrators should view suspension from school as part of a process, and one strategy in a range of options.

From time to time, it may be appropriate to assign an out-of-school suspension to a student as part of an ongoing process of modifying inappropriate behaviour. But when suspension is used, it is critically important to remember that the suspension is only one part of the process, which should also include the involvement of others, such as families, a school counsellor, the school-based team, or other service providers in the community. Suspension may be the precipitating event that results in the family, the school, and other agencies in the community coming together to collaborate on solving a problem.

Teachers and students report that there are times when short suspensions give everyone an opportunity to defuse emotional responses and then come back together to work on solutions to problem behaviour. A short period of reflection can be helpful for both the student and staff. The school may need time to organize resources or plan alternative strategies for supporting the student. School staff may need time to meet with parents to plan a collaborative approach.



British Columbia  
Ombudsman, *Fair  
Schools*, Public Report  
No. 35 (Victoria, B.C.:  
Queen's Printer, 1995).

### **Fair process in the use of school suspension**

According to B.C.'s Ombudsman, all children and youth have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. Students should be allowed to express their views and have them considered when decisions concerning their education (such as suspension from school) are being made. One of the Ombudsman's 12 suggestions for fair schools included a statement on school discipline and suspensions:

That school districts ensure that their policies and procedures for maintaining student discipline treat children and youth with behaviour problems as persons with unique or exceptional needs, and that they develop constructive alternatives, based on an integrated model of service delivery, to using out-of-school suspensions for inappropriate or challenging behaviour.

Schools are encouraged to resolve concerns at the school level. However, the B.C. *School Act* guarantees the right to a formal appeal. Parents or students may appeal a school suspension under section 11 of the Act:

If a decision of an employee of a board significantly affects the education, health, or safety of a student, the parent of the student or the student may, within reasonable time from the date that the parent or student was informed of the decision, appeal that decision to the board. (s. 11 (2))

The appeal should be viewed as a request to reconsider a decision rather than a procedure intended to assign blame. Each school district in B.C. is required to have its own local policy and procedures for hearing appeals. The Ombudsman's 1995 report gives guidelines for fair appeal procedures for districts to consider when reviewing their appeal procedures. The guidelines highlight the following rights of parents and students:

- to be heard
- to have reasons for decisions
- to receive all relevant information
- to be guaranteed impartiality, and
- to be free from retaliation.

*The Advocacy Project of the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCC-PAC) provides advice and support to students and families about fair process.*

—for more information, call  
1-888-351-9834

### **Negative aspects of suspension as a discipline strategy**

The research and literature on suspension indicate that suspension—and particularly multiple suspensions—can have negative impacts. The table below lists some of the unintended effects of out-of-school suspensions.



J. Fagan, *Recent Perspectives on Youth Violence*, keynote address to Pacific Northwest Conference on Youth Violence, Seattle, 1996.

Ministry of Women's Equality, British Columbia, *Women Count: A Statistical Profile of Women in British Columbia* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer, 1998).

**Suspension may:**

- send a message to students that they do not belong
- communicate that students are not wanted or valued—that school staff do not care
- deprive students of their dignity
- increase dependence on external locus of control and authority
- impede development of internal set of rules governing their own behaviour
- multiply stress, which may increase the level of anger
- increase likelihood of delinquent and violent behaviours (high levels of aggressive behaviour in students are predictors of later violent behaviour)
- provide means to avoid difficult social interactions or academic difficulties
- reinforce inappropriate behaviour rather than acting as a deterrent
- result in loss of access to instruction
- increase likelihood of school failure or lower grades
- send a message to students that adults think they are failures, academically or in a broader sense

**Unintended effects on students that may result include:**

- lowering self-esteem
- diminishing self-discipline
- intensifying aggressive behaviour
- increasing avoidance behaviours
- decreasing academic success

**Suspension may:**

- 
- result in situations in which students are not supervised by adults for part or all of the school day
  - increase likelihood of using alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes, and engaging in risky sexual behaviours
  - increase risk of family violence or child abuse
  - increase risk of suicide
- 
- contribute to feeling of discouragement
  - act as a factor in the decision to leave school for many students
- 
- contribute to behaviours that make the community less safe

**Unintended effects on students that may result include:**

- 
- putting children and youth at greater risk of abuse or of engaging in dangerous behaviour
- 
- increasing drop-out rate
- 
- increasing youth crime




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Russell Rumberger,  
“High School Dropouts:  
A review of issues and  
evidence,” *Review of  
Educational Research* 57,  
no. 2 (1998): 101–121.

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Gary G. Wehlage and  
Robert A. Rutter,  
“Dropping out: How  
much do schools con-  
tribute to the problem?”  
*Teachers College Record*  
87, no. 3 (1986): 374–392.

**The function of the environment**

Used in isolation, suspension removes a learner from the learning environment but does not change anything in that setting. Suspension may therefore make the circumstances in that environment even more likely to produce the same inappropriate behaviour when the student returns—especially when the student has come to see those circumstances as negative. Repeating the inappropriate behaviour will continue to be the student’s response to that environment unless something changes. Change could take a wide variety of forms, such as:

- a different instructional approach used in the setting
- different materials or tasks in the class or subject
- working with different peers
- sitting in a different location in the classroom, or
- opportunities to practise appropriate replacement behaviours in the setting.

### **Inter-ministerial concerns about suspension**

Staff from school districts and the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) share concerns about the behaviour of children and youth, and therefore need to work together effectively.

- Many principals and teachers say they need greater support from social workers and mental health professionals in dealing with students with severe behaviour problems.
- MCF staff have concerns about the use of school suspension, particularly when families do not have the resources to deal with children who are out of school.
- Staff from the school system and social workers agree that problems are aggravated when parents are unavailable or when students come from dysfunctional families.

All involved school and community service providers need to work together to coordinate interventions that will support students.

*All involved school and community service providers need to work together to coordinate interventions that will support students.*

### **Schools as sites that support other services**

Schools are seen by most social workers as largely supportive environments that assist students who are experiencing difficulties, and that afford ready access to children requiring MCF services. When students leave school, either through being suspended or by dropping out, there is a potential loss of services not only from the school system, but from MCF as well (e.g., child care workers). In addition, social workers report that school staff are a crucial source of information when risk assessments are conducted and interventions planned. When students are suspended, it becomes more difficult for social workers, mental health workers, or probation workers to closely monitor how students are doing.

### **Integrated services and case management**

Likewise, it is important for school district personnel to have the support of Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) staff and service providers in planning appropriate supports for students with behavioural problems. Social workers or foster parents are often important participants in planning for interventions to support behaviour change for students who are in the care of MCF. Behaviour problems in school may indicate possible child abuse, requiring

intervention by a child protection social worker. Schools may need advice from community mental health services about whether additional mental health assessments are needed to determine the appropriate supports for students with serious behaviour problems. Integrated case management, in which all concerned professionals collaborate on planning supports for the student, and in some cases the family, is often the best approach.

Sometimes school boards, school medical officers, superintendents, or principals suspend students with particularly disturbing or dangerous behaviour pending a mental health assessment. If such action is being considered, it should be considered in collaboration with mental health professionals. The information from mental health assessments may be critically important in determining the severity of a student's mental health problems and in planning for the student's safety as well as for the safety of students or staff.

At the same time, however, mental health professionals are not necessarily trained experts in behaviour management; their area of expertise is mental illness. School districts may therefore need to ensure that they also have access to a behaviour specialist in the school district or through a community agency.

When students are suspended, particularly those who have been in the care of MCF or who have received services in the past, their families or other care providers may turn to MCF for alternative support services for students during the school day for the duration of the suspension. MCF staff report that such services are not feasible in most instances. Problems like this, which surface when students are suspended from school, indicate a need for collaboration among schools and various community agencies on the whole range of issues around students with behavioural needs.

### **Need for formal assessment**

Behaviours that are so serious or repetitive that they might result in a student being suspended may indicate a need for a formal assessment of the student's learning and behavioural needs. The behaviours could be symptoms of a serious problem that needs to be addressed by the school, the family, and/or health professionals. Students who receive multiple or lengthy suspensions without assessment may be put at greater risk.

*The Children's Commissioner has made recommendations about suspension and inter-ministry concerns:*

*"... when a student is suspended, the school [should] liaise with other service providers in order to develop a coordinated plan to facilitate a successful re-entry into the school or prepare the student for an alternative educational placement."*

*"That the Ministry [of Education] encourage schools to determine if the Ministry for Children and Families has been involved with a child who has been suspended..."*

### Students with special needs

Research indicates that the rate of suspension for students with emotional/behaviour disorders or learning disabilities is higher than for the general population. For example, a Kansas study found that students with disabilities were more than twice as likely to be suspended or expelled. Students with identified behaviour disorders or learning disabilities made up 5.5% of the total school population, yet the two categories accounted for 22% of the suspensions and expulsions.

What does this mean? One might conclude that it shows that these two groups are more prone to behave inappropriately, and so it is logical that they be suspended from school more frequently. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted to mean that students who have disabilities have needs that should be addressed differently.

Additional assessment may provide schools and families with information and suggestions for strategies to help these students to stay in school rather than reinforcing their already negative feelings and attitudes toward school. In addition, some students who are suspended may have special needs that have not been identified. Academic, psycho-educational, or functional assessment can give schools, families, and health professionals an indication of how to support the young person.

The assessment process should address the following questions:

- Is the behaviour an isolated incident or part of a pattern of behaviour?
- Is the education program or environment appropriate to the student's ability, age, special needs, or other characteristics?
- Does the student need counselling or should a referral to other agencies in the community (e.g., MCF or mental health) be considered?
- Should specialized supports, services, or change in education placement be planned to support the student?

School staff should consider the assessed learning needs of students with disabilities when explaining to them the behaviour expectations for the school community. Methods of teaching school rules and appropriate social skills may need considerable adaptation or modification in order for some students to understand and master the required behaviour; these changes in instructional methods will need to be based on the individual's



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Sid Cooley,  
*Suspension/Expulsion of  
Regular and Special  
Education Students in  
Kansas: A Report to the  
Kansas State Board of  
Education, 1995.*

assessed needs. School staff and parents can work collaboratively to develop plans to teach and reinforce the rules for conduct.

## Follow-up after suspensions

When a student receives a suspension from school or an in-school suspension, the student's experiences during the time away from school or the classroom and upon the return are both important. Studies on the effectiveness of various discipline strategies indicate that the assignment of punishments such as suspension alone are unlikely to bring about behavioural change. Students who spend the suspension time engaged in unsupervised and unstructured activity do not usually do much reflecting on their behaviour or planning for improvement. In fact, the unstructured time provides opportunities for developing further problems during suspension.

Returning a student to a school setting in which nothing has changed—either the environment or the student's usual response to that environment—is unlikely to result in significant behaviour change. In fact, the pattern is often a series of lengthening suspensions, with all the resulting negative consequences.

Whenever possible, parents, schools, and, in certain cases, MCF staff can work together to plan interventions that will help the student begin to deal with the problems that resulted in the school suspension. While the student is away from school, the parties can work together to plan the student's return to class or school.

When students who have had multiple suspensions return to class without a more intensive intervention than the usual brief intake interview with the principal or counsellor, they are likely to repeat the type of behaviour for which the suspension was assigned. When additional support for students is in place after their time away from school, they are more likely to change their behaviour. Maintaining contact with the student during the suspension also helps with the transition back to class.

Two main types of follow-up intervention show promise:

- instructional activities for teaching appropriate replacement behaviours for the inappropriate behaviour (e.g., might include developing an Individual Education Plan for the student), and
- counselling interventions that give the student opportunities to make plans for dealing with problem situations and to practise the required behaviours.

*Returning a student to a school setting in which nothing has changed is unlikely to result in significant behaviour change.*



**Role of the School-Based Team**

The School-Based Team may serve as a problem-solving group for planning appropriate support after a student's suspension. Many students can benefit from assistance in dealing with frustrations about their academic performance or problems with peers or authority figures. The school counsellor, support teacher, or learning assistance teacher may be the appropriate source of needed support. An understanding staff member can help the student make a plan for dealing with the area of difficulty. Activities such as social skills or conflict resolution instruction can be beneficial. Learning activities on topics related to the problem behaviour area can help students develop more acceptable responses to stress, conflict, and frustration. Setting up remedial assistance or organizing peer tutoring may be appropriate.

School leaders who rely heavily on suspension as the main disciplinary action, or who find that there are more suspensions than they believe are appropriate, may need to examine the entire school climate. Research on school effectiveness has shown that one of the features of an effective school is that the school environment is orderly and safe. To foster such an environment, the school community must carefully assess itself and plan changes to make it more conducive to learning, both academic and social. Planning should include:

- developing goals for the whole school community
- creating a spirit of teamwork to reach those goals, and
- securing the necessary resources to implement the plan to meet those goals.

One of the most important goals of any school leader is to create a positive school climate that is safe for all children and adults. This is only achievable, however, when there is also an expectation that learners can learn and when student and staff accomplishments are recognized.

### **Planning to improve school climate and student behaviour**

When undertaking school evaluation processes such as accreditation, the school community, including students, staff, and parents, examines the whole area of school culture. To understand a school's culture and plan for its improvement, it is essential to include in the evaluation process an examination of:

- suspension and retention rates, and
- how the school deals with student behaviour.

An important part of this planning has usually been reconsidering the school's code of conduct and school discipline. Schools cannot set standards for behavioural expectations and then expect students to meet these standards simply because they have been set. School staff, students, and parents who work on developing and communicating the school rules must then also provide positive recognition for individuals and the community as a whole when these rules are followed, or when progress

*School staff, students, and parents must provide positive recognition for individuals and the school community as a whole when school rules are followed.*

is made toward goals for improvement. Schools should not take for granted that students will follow the codes of conduct.

School effectiveness is enhanced by recognizing staff and students. Developing a theme for the school year and planning events to promote the theme can build identity and a sense of belonging. Here are some other ways to achieve school effectiveness:

- recognizing academic achievements and improvements (e.g., honour roll or student of the week)
- planning formal and informal opportunities for greater parent involvement in the school community
- providing programs that promote better attendance and recognize levels of attendance and punctuality
- planning recognition for good citizenship, participation, positive behaviour, and respect for others
- planning presentations and celebrations to honour student achievements in all these areas.

### **Pro-active goals for improving school climate and reducing suspension**

Refining existing school-wide plans or establishing new goals for strengthening the school climate may take some commitment from the school community. Any new plan will require energy, but the positive results will fuel the efforts of staff, students, and families.

An emphasis on preventing misbehaviour through effective academic and behavioural education of all students is effective. When all staff and students get involved in a plan to improve student behaviour, the sense of commitment and teamwork provides a strong foundation for change. Significant reductions in the need for suspension can be seen in school communities that focus on such pro-active programs. Key elements of successful efforts to improve student behaviour in schools include:

- establishing behaviour improvement as one of the main goals of the school
- setting up a program with adequate resources to move in this direction
- creating a school-wide approach to social skills promotion
- teaching and reinforcing social skills with all students

- modeling identified social skills by all school staff members
- providing students with opportunities to practise the skills and receive recognition for success.

### **Involving parents**

When setting behaviour change goals for a school in order to improve school climate and reduce suspension, school staff should not underestimate the power of involving parents and other parts of the community. Positive relationships with parents and high levels of parent involvement in schools contribute to school effectiveness. When parents and educators work together on improvement goals, positive results can be seen for students in both academics and behaviour.

The problems students experience in school may in fact mirror problems that their parents experienced during their own schooling. Efforts to reach out to parents and be inviting will in turn benefit their children. Principals play an important leadership role in working effectively with parents and involving them in meaningful ways as part of the school community. Some Parent Advisory Councils have initiated programs to reach out to and involve other parents who have not traditionally participated in parent groups. Schools have set up parent rooms with refreshments, resources, and even programs in collaboration with other community agencies. Some schools have involved parents in modeling appropriate playground activities and behaviour on the playground. The school-based team can welcome parents as real partners in problem solving.

*School staff should not underestimate the power of involving parents.*

### Codes of conduct and discipline alternatives to suspension

When schools undertake a review of their discipline policies and codes of conduct, they may wish to introduce alternatives to suspension that focus on teaching new behaviours rather than punishing for misbehaviour. The table below includes some examples.

Examples of Problem Behaviour	Examples of Instructional Discipline Options: student outcomes	Examples of Consequence Options	Examples of Program Options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fighting on the playground/school yard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student will develop a plan for an alternative response to peers and practise by role playing with counsellor or teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lose privilege of recess or break free time</li> <li>Spend recess or break in an isolated setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in conflict resolution training sessions or anger management skills training with school counsellor</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teasing peers in the lunchroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student will demonstrate understanding of lunchroom behaviour expectations in written or oral form to vice-principal (or lunch supervisor, teacher, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spend lunch period in alternative space</li> <li>Eat lunch in the school office with supervision</li> <li>Remain in the classroom for lunch period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in anti-bullying or bullying prevention activities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refusal to follow teacher directions to stay on task and to complete assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student will develop short- and long-term plans for meeting the requirements of the course or curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move to another area of the classroom away from students who are on task</li> <li>Move to another nearby classroom for a “time in”</li> <li>Lose classroom privileges (free time activities, class computer, choices, etc.)</li> <li>Lose marks for incomplete assignments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possible instruction on learning strategies or other remedial support to assist student with academic difficulties</li> <li>Sessions with school counsellor to set life/career goals and co-plan an educational program with courses aimed at those goals</li> </ul>

Examples of Problem Behaviour	Examples of Instructional Discipline Options: student outcomes	Examples of Consequence Options	Examples of Program Options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smoking in school washroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student will demonstrate an understanding of the school rules and provincial laws regarding smoking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lose privilege of unsupervised time on school property</li> <li>• Lose privilege of using washroom unsupervised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in smoking cessation program</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skipping classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skipping classes Student will demonstrate positive decision-making skills that show an understanding of long-term consequences of missing class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make up time in noon hour detentions</li> <li>• Lose privilege of socializing with peers (if skipping was part of a group activity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in Saturday school to complete work missed</li> <li>• Meet with counsellor or other mentor to explore the function of the skipping behaviour</li> </ul>

Options for one school may not be appropriate for another school or community. School communities should develop options that fit their own situations. Discipline policies will need to include procedures for the administrators to follow when students refuse to participate in the planned instructional consequence.

### Consequences for misbehaviour

In all discipline strategies, school staff should model being fair and consistent. Consequences should be carefully designed so that they do not inadvertently become reinforcers. If the student's goal for the misbehaviour is to gain negative attention, then a consequence that provides this negative attention may actually backfire. When a student is removed from the lunchroom for misbehaviour, for example, and sent to the school office, the consequence offers many opportunities for gaining negative attention from peers, staff, or even the principal. The classroom teacher or principal who deals with student misbehaviour must set up ways for the student to receive positive attention, in addition to providing consequences for negative attention-seeking behaviour.

When loss of privileges is used as a consequence, the privilege lost should have a logical connection to the misbehaviour. For example, losing lunchroom privileges for misbehaviour on the bus has a very weak



**Focus on Bullying:  
A Prevention Program  
for Elementary School  
Communities**

The Ministry of Education has distributed to all elementary schools a resource developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Attorney General and the Safe School Centre. The program provides a framework for developing school action plans aimed at preventing and responding to bullying behaviour.

**TROO:**

**Total Respect of Others**

The Ministry of Attorney General sponsors a training program with resources for schools to assist in creating school communities that foster empathy and respect, and that deal effectively with issues of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping.

**For more information,  
contact:**

Safe School Centre  
1-888-224-SAFE  
(1-888-224-7233)

logical connection. A more logical connection to the misbehaviour could be a different seating arrangement on the bus, or having to use another bus and then walk part of the way home from school instead of using the regular bus. If the student does not see the relationship between the behaviour and the result, then the discipline applied will have little or even negative effect. When students do not see the logic of a punishment they are more likely to respond with further misbehaviour.

### **Bullying and harassment prevention programs**

One of the most serious behaviour concerns in schools is bullying. Parents and school staff agree that safety of students is a great concern, and that bullying can lead to violence if left unchecked. Schools looking to improve school-wide behaviour have successfully implemented anti-bullying programs as part of their discipline or school safety initiatives. Successful programs usually have three components:

- information for schools and the community about the nature of bullying or harassing behaviour and why it is unacceptable
- suggestions for implementing a strategy to reduce bullying and/or harassment
- actual instructional activities for students.

### **Peer helping: counselling/mediation/conflict resolution**

School and community programs that pair peers who are willing to assist others with children or youth who have difficulties such as behavioural problems have been successful in many places across North America. Peers can offer support ranging from tutoring other students to mediating conflicts.

Peer mediation or peer conflict resolution programs feature groups of student volunteers who are trained to help their peers resolve disputes. The trained students assist their peers in resolving conflicts before they escalate into confrontations or physical aggression. Training of the volunteers focusses on understanding the concept of mediation and the various ways of resolving conflicts, and on role-playing the steps used in resolving disputes. These children or youth can then model effective interactions. Reported success rates for peer mediation in resolving peer disputes range from 58% to 93%.

In elementary schools, peer mediators usually work on the playground and respond to problems on the spot. In secondary schools, peer mediators tend to meet with peers by referral after a dispute has surfaced, and their work is more formal and often supervised by the school counsellor or administrator. Students who respond to conflict in ways that might result in suspension can learn non-violent ways to resolve conflicts from their peers. The trained students act as models, but the goal is for all students in the school community to eventually develop skills for resolving disputes peacefully.

## Mentoring

Some schools have found that providing an adult mentor from within the school community for a student with challenging behaviour can help to keep the student in school. Mentors work most effectively when they have had some training in positive behaviour techniques. Staff mentors establish relationships with students who are experiencing behavioural or emotional difficulties or who are at risk of developing problems. They assist the students in resolving conflicts, making positive decisions, planning behaviour change, and getting assistance if there are academic problems. Mentoring programs have resulted in significant behavioural and academic gains for students before situations escalate to the point where suspension is necessary.

## Saturday school

The literature on suspension has increasingly emphasized the use of Saturday school. This is partly because suspending students for truancy, defiance, or work refusal are all illogical and result in the student missing even more instruction. Consequences that focus on making up lost time for skipping school or not participating in instructional activities because of inappropriate behaviour or work refusal make sense to students and parents. The messages of Saturday school and school suspension are apparently quite different to students.

When Saturday school is used, students are assigned to make up time on Saturday under the supervision of school district staff. Some Saturday school programs are cooperatively developed by schools and community groups. Students assigned to the program work on regular assignments or specialized learning activities related to their problem behaviour. Rather than rejecting students or providing an opportunity for them to further avoid academic tasks, the Saturday school model




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David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Bruce Dudley, "Effects of peer mediation training on elementary school students" *Mediation Quarterly* 10 (1992): 89–99.



**For more information on all types of peer helping, contact the Peer Resources Network. The network maintains a database of peer programs, and provides internet and print resources, training, and networking on peer support.**  
Peer Resource Network,  
1052 Davie Street,  
Victoria, B.C. V8S 4E3  
<http://www.peer.ca/helping.html>



keeps students in the school community and provides an opportunity for them to catch up on assignments missed, while at the same time removing the privilege of unstructured time on the weekend.

### **Back-of-the-class “time ins”**

Having a disruptive student sit at the back of another classroom for a period of time to work on assignments has been a very successful alternative to suspension in some schools. Teachers can arrange to operate buddy classrooms to help each other with this strategy. When a student’s behaviour is unacceptable and interferes with the other pupils’ learning, the student is escorted to a prearranged nearby classroom. While excluded from the regular class, the student is still responsible for completing assignments. This intervention seems to be particularly effective when the students in the “time in” class are significantly older or younger than the offending student. The message that learning is important and that interfering with learning is not acceptable seems to be communicated well, with minimum disruption to class activities. Later, the teacher follows up with the student, and together they work on resolving the situation that resulted in the exclusion.

### **Flexible scheduling**

Some schools have found that the traditional school day is not the best option for certain students, and have offered a flexible schedule or timetable to accommodate those students who function and learn better later in the day. Some students have family responsibilities or jobs that make it hard for them to get enough sleep to function effectively early in the morning; this often results in tardiness, unauthorized absences, or irritable and volatile behaviour. Other students have biological clocks that make them naturally more efficient and cooperative later in the day. Exploring altered school day schedules to meet the needs of individual learners may help some communities to increase retention of students in school and decrease truancy, tardiness, skipping, irritable behaviour, or inattentiveness—all situations that can become chronic problems and lead to out-of-school suspension.

## In-school suspension

Another school-wide alternative to out-of-school suspension is in-school suspension. This type of program has several advantages:

- Students remain supervised within the school setting, so that they are not left on their own at home or in the community.
- Students continue working on regular curriculum activities, so that being assigned an in-school suspension is not a means to escape academic tasks.
- Social skills instruction and opportunities to practise social skills can be included in the program when appropriate.
- Students can focus their attention on accepting responsibility for their own behaviour and working out solutions with support from staff.
- Students can get academic support for difficulties with class work and make plans for improving their study skills.
- Teachers continue to be responsible for instruction and assessment of students' work. Referring a student to the principal for an in-school suspension is not a way for teachers to transfer responsibility for the student's education program to another person.

In-school suspension is not intended to be used simply as a detention. This approach is intended to reinforce three things:

- The student is a valued member of the school community, even though his or her behaviour has been unacceptable and there must be consequences.
- The school is a place for learning, and misbehaviour does not mean that the student is no longer responsible as a learner.
- The time spent on the in-school suspension is intended to be an opportunity for behaviour change.

To be successful, in-school suspension must have a philosophical framework agreed on by staff. An in-school suspension program should also be designed for the particular school and community. As with any other school-wide intervention, school staff should spend time planning and developing solutions for how to best implement in-school




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C. MacWilliams, *Positive Measures: An In-School Alternative to Suspension*. Summit Educational Services, 1992.

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S. Hochman, and W. Worner. "In-school suspension and group counseling: Helping the at-risk student." *NASSP Bulletin* 71, no. 501 (1987): 93–96.



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John McDonald, et al.,  
*Real Justice Training  
Manual: Coordinating  
Family Group  
Conferences* (Sidney,  
Australia: Transformative  
Justice Australia, 1995).

suspension. Staff resources for supervising the site are planned by a school or district based on local or building priorities. Sometimes two schools share an in-school suspension site, when the location of the schools allows for a coordinated effort. Other schools team up to provide in-school suspension for one another so that students attend another school for a short period of time. In still other cases, inter-agency involvement may be appropriate. For example, schools and Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) staff may decide to work together to plan in-school suspension centres.

Referrals to the program must be formalized and well known to the whole school and parents. Appropriate supervision by trained staff must be provided, and space that allows for students to work in isolation from one another is important.

### **Restorative justice**

Some schools and communities have organized community justice programs based on the concept of restorative justice for dealing with more serious school rule infractions. Restorative justice programs can provide conflict resolution and increased youth responsibility for actions.

In instances of criminal behaviour, schools should contact the police. Together, the school, police, and other agencies may be able to use a restorative justice approach. When the problem behaviour includes harming another person or a person's property, restorative justice provides an opportunity for both the student with the problem behaviour and the victim to work out reasonable consequences. The goal is to reduce harm and minimize the likelihood that the student will engage in the unacceptable behaviour again.

The idea was originally piloted in New Zealand and Australia, and is now being used in communities in B.C.. Designed for youth offenders who admit their guilt, these community justice programs include representatives from police and youth justice and use "family group conferencing." Program features include:

- providing an alternative to suspension from school or formal charges in the criminal justice system for offences that occur in the school setting or for events related to school
- using loss of friends' respect as a more effective sanction for youth than official disapproval

- involving families in the proceedings, when possible
- confronting unacceptable behaviour and negotiating appropriate consequences
- encouraging reconciliation of offenders and victims, with both re-integrating into the school community with a reduced risk of the events occurring again.

Parents of both parties feel they have been part of the process and are more cooperative with school efforts to help students with behaviour change. The family, school, and in some cases the police can work together to solve behavioural difficulties.

### Alternative education

Some students who are having difficulty in the traditional school setting can do very well in an alternative setting. Caution should be used, however, in seeing alternative education as a solution for all students who are not coping with the traditional school. Alternate schools may not have a full range of programs and services, and there may be waiting lists for entrance which mean that students are without schooling while they wait for a program to have a vacancy.

Alternate programs within schools or elsewhere in the community offer educational experiences that are different from a traditional school. These programs are typically designed to meet the emotional and educational needs of learners who are experiencing difficulty. Programs across the province vary widely, from school-based programs designed as short-term or preventive solutions to community-based programs for students who have left school or been refused an educational program. The majority of students attending alternate schools in B.C. are adolescents, although there is an increasing number of younger students who attend alternate programs. A common emphasis is on acquiring social and pre-employment skills. Many programs emphasize work experience as a key part of the student's program.

### Distance education and on-line programs

As another alternative, schools can access correspondence courses offered by distance education schools across B.C. to deliver a portion of the educational program while maintaining the student in school. Open



For more information on restorative justice in B.C., consult the *Community Accountability Programs Information Package*, available from the **Ministry of Attorney General**:  
Community Programs Division,  
Ministry of Attorney General,  
401 – 5021 Kingsway,  
Burnaby BC V5H 4A5  
Tel: (604) 663-2605

Schools is mandated to prepare teaching and learning materials for grades K–12.

The internet is evolving into a tool for delivering curriculum to students who need an alternative strategy for completing studies. These online programs are flexible—a student can access the curriculum from anywhere at any time and progress at his or her own pace. BC CONNECT is a computer-enhanced distance education program. Students can use the internet to complete courses that have been developed from the print-based distance education curriculum; the courses will eventually include e-mail links to teachers, peers, and even outside experts. BC CONNECT's offerings will likely expand as more students and schools gain access to the Provincial Learning Network. Other provinces in Canada also have internet educational programs. In Ontario, for example, the Virtual High School offers all the courses required for an Ontario secondary school graduation certificate.



**For more information on distance education and BC CONNECT, contact one of the distance education schools or consult the *Distance Education K–12 Guidebook*, available in all school districts and on the internet at <http://www.open-school.bc.ca/de/>**

Many secondary schools are providing learning opportunities that are assisted, managed, or enhanced by computers, such as Pathfinder and Plato computer-based systems. These and an ever-increasing variety of others offer educational opportunities for students who need an individualized course or curriculum. In some cases, students who might otherwise be suspended opt to do some or all of their course work by computer.

Instructional strategies and classroom management have a significant impact on student behaviour, and therefore impact the need for school suspensions. Many inappropriate student behaviours that result in disciplinary action such as suspension begin with classroom interactions between students or between staff and students.

### **Classroom management**

Establishing clear classroom rules and expectations for behaviour and applying them consistently for all students are essential in preventing inappropriate behaviour:

- Establish clear classroom routines and rules, and communicate them to students in positive terms.
- When feasible, develop the routines and expectations with the students.
- Keep expectations simple, easy to learn, and appropriate to the developmental level of the students.
- Post the rules in the classroom and illustrate with pictures or symbols for students who are visual learners or who are reading below the class level.

*Classrooms with positive student behaviour have high levels of recognition and positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviour.*

Reasonable and consistent consequences and recognition for positive behaviour are important. If students don't see the discipline response as logical or fair, lack of cooperation or defiance may increase, and the cycle that all too often ends up in school suspension may begin.

Students almost universally respond negatively to a staff reaction that is seen as unfair. As a general rule, teachers need to consistently model the school codes of conduct through their own behaviour everywhere in the school. Classrooms with positive student behaviour have high levels of recognition and positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviour.

Even with the clearest positive classroom rules there will still be problems with behaviour from time to time. But there are a number of other strategies that schools can use to increase the likelihood of appropriate behaviour. These strategies are outlined in this section.

## Instruction

Teachers often need to look beyond the assumption that the student's inappropriate behaviour is willful and to see it as evidence that there is a need to consider different instructional strategies. Student-centred curriculum that engages students can reduce the likelihood of alienation and encourage cooperation and commitment to completing tasks. Activities that affirm respect and care for others can contribute to positive behaviour and engagement. Classroom strategies that encourage both individual and collective achievement (e.g., cooperative learning) can promote cooperation and provide opportunities for students to learn appropriate social skills and problem-solving techniques. All this can contribute to improvement in student behaviour.

Instruction should be provided at a challenging yet attainable level for all students in the class. Patterns of off-task behaviour and refusal to follow teachers' directions can be a student's response to academic tasks that are too difficult or seen by the learner as irrelevant. For students with well-established escape and avoidance behaviours, this may not be easy to detect. Students who present challenging behaviour may need further assessment of their learning needs. The concepts and skills required for the tasks at hand may be too difficult for them. They may be masking their embarrassment or frustration by using inappropriate behaviour.

A shift in instructional strategy often helps deal with the behavioural difficulty. Well-disciplined classrooms have instructional styles that emphasize strengths and encourage growth rather than pointing out deficits and failures. Successful strategies include:

- presenting academic tasks in a more structured way
- breaking assignments into steps that are manageable
- providing more individualized instructions for some students
- adapting materials or using peer assistance
- providing more frequent positive teacher feedback on student progress.

All students need an opportunity to be successful. The learner who defies the teacher and says the work is “stupid” or “boring” may be saying that it is too difficult. A student who has trouble spelling may refuse to revise a poorly written first draft. What on the surface seems like defiance is in fact a hint that another strategy is needed.



**See these Ministry of Education resource handbooks for teachers:**

*Teaching Students with Learning and Behavioural Differences: A Resource Guide for Teachers*

*Teaching Students with Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder: A Resource Guide for Teachers*

*Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/ Effects: A Resource Guide for Teachers*

## Classroom environment

The physical environment of the classroom can support appropriate behaviour or become a stress factor for students and teachers. For some people, stress factors can increase the likelihood of irritability or even aggressive behaviour. To create a less stressful learning environment, it generally helps to reduce clutter and increase predictability.

There are no universal strategies for fostering orderly behaviour in a particular class, but staff flexibility and sensitivity towards individual student responses to different classroom arrangements are important. For example, some students find it difficult to stay on task when they are working near high traffic areas or noisy learning centres. Teachers report that providing some seating choices for students depending on their mood can be helpful in supporting appropriate behaviour. Student requests to work in another spot should be heard and honoured.

Decisions about the physical environment should be based on the needs of both the students and staff who use the space. Many students respond positively to background music without lyrics during independent work periods. Students and teachers who are not stressed can be expected to work more effectively.

## Adequate supervision

When schools examine patterns of problem behaviour, they often find that problems with supervision of students have contributed to the escalation of behaviour problems. Aggressive behaviour between students in the classroom usually happens when staff are not present or vigilant. Problems in other areas of the school can be brought into the classroom after breaks and lunch. Teachers should be sensitive to the fact that their students are in various stages of self-discipline development and plan supervision accordingly.

## Classroom assessment

Teachers today are challenged by the diverse learning needs of students in their classes. Meeting these challenges calls for creative solutions. Classroom assessment techniques designed to enhance learning and convey to students that they can learn successfully will contribute to positive behaviour. Teachers who use assessment as part of a systematic plan for gathering information about what students need to learn, rather



**Ministry resources are available for educators through:**

Office Products Centre,  
4248 Glanford Avenue,  
Victoria BC V8Z 4B8  
Tel: 1-800-282-7955

**Resources for educators are also available on the Special Education**

**Website :**  
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/>



than measuring what they do not know, will find the positive orientation is communicated and adopted by the learners as well.

Assessment techniques should:

- recognize the diversity of students
- allow for differences in rates, styles, and facility of learning
- include criterion-referenced assessment, and
- clearly communicate to students and their parents the standards for success that are expected.

Assessment techniques should include clear communication of the teacher's expectations for success in the learning activities. Frequent sharing of information with individual students about their progress and encouraging them to reflect on their growth as learners can increase motivation and decrease off-task and inappropriate behaviour.

*“The interpersonal relationship between adult and student is the single most important variable in the change process.”*

—from Thomas M. Shea and Anne M. Bauer, *Teaching Children and Youth With Behaviour Disorders* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1987)

## Communication style

The literature on discipline and behaviour includes information about effective teacher–student communications. Communication with students should focus on affirming rather than gaining compliance. Teachers and other school staff may inadvertently escalate the inappropriate behaviour of students by using ineffective communication strategies. Teachers or other educators may need to increase their communication skills and model them in their dealings with one another and with students. Some students can become aggressive if they end up in a power struggle with an authority figure. Student defiance can escalate to the point where suspension is the resulting discipline measure.

The quality of personal relationships between students and the teacher contributes significantly to well-disciplined classrooms. Students say “teachers who care” are the most important variable in the quality of their schooling. Personalizing the relationships between students and school staff members can contribute to positive classrooms and improved behaviour.

School staff may need to train themselves to be more aware of their own responses to student misbehaviour. Teachers or other school personnel may inadvertently contribute to the student's aggressive response or loss of control by demanding that the student respond, or by requiring acquiescence or compliance, arguing with the student, or delivering

ultimatums. Behaviour rarely escalates beyond non-compliance unless the student interacts further with someone. The teacher who wants to avoid escalating a student's misbehaviour should disengage from the situation and provide an acceptable alternative to the originally expected behaviour. For example, proximity is a good technique for providing external control, but some people may feel threatened by too much proximity. Students may come to the classroom with previous experiences in which proximity meant harm—for example, in which they have been abused or bullied. An angry student may lash out at a peer or a teacher if he or she is touched or threatened.

If a student is anxious or angry, it is probably not a good time to have an intense discussion. Adults can accidentally provoke students into behaviour that would not otherwise have occurred. Using calm, matter-of-fact language and standing at an angle to the person rather than face to face can be more successful. It is only after a crisis that a student can benefit from making a plan for behaviour change. Trying to defuse the emotion and dealing with it later is usually a more fruitful approach. The teacher can then dispassionately analyse the events and determine the function of the misbehaviour. The teacher can also plan to teach alternative behaviours to the non-compliant behaviours. And the student can be kept in school to work on these acceptable behaviours rather than being suspended and not being able to learn or practise the behaviours in a natural setting.

## Staff development

Just as students need support in developing appropriate behaviour, so school staff members may need staff development to learn new, proactive strategies for improving student behaviour and responding to student misbehaviour. School leaders should identify the ongoing professional development needs of their teaching colleagues and provide opportunities for training in classroom management, assessment, adapting curriculum, cooperative learning, or other topics that appear to be needed by individuals or groups.

All adults in the school should adopt the modeling and teaching of social skills and routines as a legitimate part of their job as educators. Staff may need help in developing a framework in which problem behaviours are seen not as a personal affront to their adult authority, but rather as teachable opportunities. Providing opportunities for students to choose alternative behaviours affirms that schools are in the business of supporting learning rather than punishing.

*"We often tell, but we don't teach. We have to show kids how to respond in anger-provoking situations."*

—from Richard Curwin, *As Tough as Necessary: Countering Violence, Aggression, and Hostility in Our Schools* (Baltimore, Md.: ASCD, 1997)



# EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PRACTICES THAT MAY REDUCE SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

## School-community interventions

### Youth Action Teams

A community-based program of the Ministry of Attorney General, Youth Action Teams (YATs) help develop youth programs. Youth plan and put into action anti-violence and recreation projects. YATs encourage positive peer mentorship, conflict resolution, and youth community leadership.

Positive peer relations can have a profound effect on youth and their capacity to meet the expectations of school and community. YATs focus on encouraging positive peer relationships, to counter negative peer groups that foster oppositional behaviour. YATs are currently operating in 65 communities across B.C., with over 700 youths involved.

### All Together Now, General Brock Elementary School (Vancouver, B.C.)

This early intervention program is one of several pilot programs for elementary youth. Two advisory committees—one consisting of community representatives and one of students—support students in planning youth-led programs. Some of the activities planned by the students at General Brock Elementary School have been aimed at providing positive role models for children. Their “Hero Passport” activities included hosting role models from the community to give talks on their personal stories, visits to sites that celebrate heroes (e.g., the Terry Fox memorial), and planned interactions between parents and students designed to elicit healthy interactions about heroes. Another activity was a youth-led community graffiti clean-up, in which more than 400 people from the community, police, and business contributed to a major clean-up campaign to remove graffiti. Community project workers and school staff work together to support students in planning and carrying out their programs.



**For more information on Youth Action Teams or All Together Now, contact:**

Youth Action Team,  
Community Programs  
Division,  
Ministry of Attorney  
General,  
401 – 5021 Kingsway,  
Burnaby BC V5H 4A5  
Tel: (604) 660-2605



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Michael Grice, *Positive Alternatives to School Suspension (P.A.S.S.): Portland Public Schools Evaluation Report* (Portland, Ore.: Portland Public Schools, 1986).

### **Positive Alternatives to School Suspension (PASS) Program**

Project PASS was developed in Florida in the 1970s with the goal of preventing out-of-school suspensions. The original program had four components:

- training for school staff in effective strategies for interacting with youth who have challenging behaviours
- providing parent training focussed on communication and problem solving with their children
- setting up resource rooms managed by trained staff where students could be assigned for inappropriate behaviour
- providing counselling to families and students.

Several secondary schools in Portland, Oregon started a similar program in the 1980s. Schools set up a coordinator with a trained teacher assistant to staff the resource room. In some cases, the coordinator was the vice-principal in charge of school discipline. The program saw 50% reductions in fighting and resulting suspensions. The success of the intervention is attributed to preventive problem solving, increase in effective communication skills among students and parents, and counselling for students and families.

In a B.C. application of this program, staff from schools and community agencies would need to work together to plan the family component of the program and ensure that interventions in school and with families are coordinated and enhance one another.

### **Youth Conference Committee, Ridge Meadows Youth and Justice Advocacy Association (Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, B.C.)**

When students break codes of conduct in schools, they may also be charged with criminal offences such as theft or possession of narcotics. Communities such as Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are responding to youth crime with restorative justice interventions. These two communities have had such a program since 1994 with a success rate of over 90%. (Success consists of the youth not re-offending for a minimum of one year.)

A community-based board oversees the program. The board includes mayors of the two communities, police, RCMP, a probation officer, a school principal, and a clergy member from the local ministerial associa-

tion. The board appoints a committee of volunteers who make up the panels that hear cases. The offender, in some cases the victim, and three volunteers (one who will then act as a mentor to the student) meet to deal with the incident. Parents are involved in the proceedings as well. The volunteer panel hears everyone and proposes a solution that fits the offence. When the incident has taken place at school, students, teachers, or the principal may be part of the meeting. Solutions range from an apology to restitution. The mentor ensures that the solution is carried out and assists the student for a period of three to six months in solving problems. Suspension is rarely used, and other solutions appear to be successful, with students' ties to the school being maintained and students not missing instruction.

## School-wide interventions

### Behaviour and Discipline Program, Mt. Prevost Middle School (Duncan, B.C.)

Staff at Mt. Prevost Middle School formed a working group in 1997 to tackle the task of improving the school climate and student behaviour. Mt. Prevost had been experiencing some stresses on the school community: key staff members had left the school, the school building was undergoing major renovations, and the school was overcrowded. The rate of school suspensions was becoming worrisome. They called their pro-active program the Behaviour and Discipline – “B.A.D.” – Program. The staff adopted the program idea from the Effective Behaviour Support training sponsored by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Administrators of Special Education at UBC in the summer of 1997.

The school-wide system intervention included development of a Mt. Prevost code of conduct, known as the “4 BEs” – Be respectful, Be prepared, Be punctual, and Be positive. The program features instruction in how to follow the 4 BEs and recognizes positive student behaviour in the school. Students are rewarded each week for following the 4 BEs with raffles for movie passes, pizza, and other prizes.

The B.A.D. program has moved beyond the school building and into the community. Many businesses and community agencies have donated time, money, and prizes to the school for recognizing positive behaviour. As the program has only been under way for one year, however, it is too early to know the full impact on rates of school suspension.



**For more information on the restorative justice program in Ridge Meadows, contact:**  
Program Coordinator,  
Youth Conference  
Committee,  
208 – 11939 224<sup>th</sup> St.,  
Maple Ridge, BC V2X 6B2  
Tel: (604) 467-5889

*“Everyone seems to be responding quite well to it. I think that rewarding students for good behaviour is an important part in making students feel like part of the school.”*

—a Mt. Prevost student

**Saturday School (Prince George, B.C.)**

Schools in Prince George have adopted Saturday school as a consequence for truancy and persistent tardiness, rather than using out-of-school suspension. Students are assigned to four hours of class on Saturday by school administrators, to make up lost time and help students develop self-discipline and responsibility. Parents are notified and responsible for providing transportation if it is too far for the student to walk. The Saturday sessions are staffed by qualified teachers on a contract basis. Sometimes groups of schools work together to run one Saturday school centre. Students bring regular course work to complete during Saturday school or complete curriculum packages on topics such as decision making or understanding the school code of conduct. Saturday school is sometimes assigned as a consequence for other inappropriate behaviour, but it is not intended to accommodate students with aggressive or defiant behaviour. Saturday school in Prince George has had favourable results in decreasing the use of suspension for truancy and tardiness, and most students respond by increasing their attendance and punctuality.



**For more information on Second Step, see the Committee for Children web site:**  
<http://www.cfchildren.org/violence.htm>

**The Second Step curriculum is distributed by:**  
Committee for Children,  
2203 Airport Way South  
Suite 500,  
Seattle WA,  
98134 – 2027 USA  
Tel: 1-800-634-4449

**Second Step**

Second Step is a school-based social skills program that teaches students new attitudes and behaviours to reduce aggressive behaviour. Curriculum outcomes include developing skills of social competence: impulse control, empathy, and anger management. The program includes lessons at the Preschool/Kindergarten, grades 1–3, and grades 4–5 levels. The structure of the lesson plans provides modeling activities, opportunities to practise the new skills, and positive reinforcement for demonstrating the skills. The program also includes a video-based parent component to help families work on the same skills at home. Many schools in B.C. and the United States have implemented Second Step and speak highly of its merit.

**SOAR Program, Sea View Elementary-Secondary School (Port Alice, B.C.)**

Staff and students at Sea View Elementary-Secondary School initiated a new school-wide program in 1997/98 based on the Effective Behaviour Support model. The school developed a new behaviour code around the acronym for Safety, Organization, Attitude, and Responsibility – SOAR. It outlines students' rights and responsibilities, including the right to be safe and the responsibility for the safety of others. Appropriate rules of

conduct were developed and taught for various settings in the school. Students presented assemblies to model the basics of SOAR. Students earn tickets for following the school code. Although the program is still very new and the results are not conclusive, early results indicate that incidents of defiance of authority and breaking school rules have decreased significantly.

### **Honour Level Discipline Program**

Frank Lloyd Wright Middle School in Minnesota has developed a school-wide program to deal with disruptive student behaviour. In the 1992/93 school year, 3000 discipline referrals resulted in 1300 suspensions and 400 in-school suspensions. The school staff decided they needed a whole new approach to problem behaviour. They set up an incentive program in which positive behaviour is rewarded. Students earn their way onto the school Honour Levels. The program is based on the ideas in *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, by Branto, Brokenleg and Van Bockern, which speaks to the four needs of all children: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. This resource is also mentioned favourably by educators who work in B.C. schools with Aboriginal students.

Along with the positive aspects of the innovation, the school also redesigned its in-school suspension program into what became the Learning Centre. Students who are assigned time in the Learning Centre receive services based on the four needs mentioned above. Rather than being a holding site for students who have exasperated teachers with their behaviour, the centre became a place to make up missed work, set personal behaviour and career goals, receive extra assistance on academic tasks, and receive peer counselling.

Two years after the implementation of the Honour Level Program at Frank Lloyd Wright, out-of-school suspensions had been reduced by 46%.

### **Project Achieve, Ron Brent Elementary School (Prince George, B.C.)**

This school-wide intervention program was originally developed at the University of Florida by George Bach and Howard Knoff. Project Achieve involves social skills training with an emphasis on helping children develop a repertoire of appropriate behaviours that they may not have developed at home.




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Conrad Farner and Frank Lloyd, "Proactive alternatives to school suspension," *Journal of Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers* 16, no. 2 (1996): 25–30.



Acceptable behaviour is taught in the environments where the behaviours are expected. All school staff are committed to carrying out this informal instruction throughout the school. The curricula used for formal instruction are chosen by the staff as the most appropriate ones from the social skills curriculum developed by Arnold Goldstein and others. They consist of skills for both self-control and problem solving.



**For more information on Lions-Quest, contact:**  
Lions-Quest Canada —  
Life Skills Education,  
515 Dotzert Court, Unit 7,  
Waterloo ON N2L 6A7  
Tel: 1-800-265-2680

### **Lions-Quest Life Skills Program and Skills for Adolescence**

Lions-Quest is a program for elementary and middle school-aged students with learning activities for developing self-discipline, responsibility, good decision making, getting along with others, and other pro-social skills. The Skills for Adolescence program was developed in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators. The curricula and training were developed and sponsored by the Lions Club International and have been implemented in many schools across B.C. The programs can also involve parents and facilitate community partnerships with schools.

### **In-School Suspension Program, Carney Hill Elementary (Prince George, B.C.)**

The staff of Carney Hill Elementary developed an in-school suspension room (ISS Room) to be used as a consequence for inappropriate behaviours such as non-compliance with staff, physical aggression, destruction of property, and use of inappropriate language. This program is not used for more serious behaviours, such as possession of drugs or weapons, or behaviour that puts other students or staff in immediate danger.

The purpose of assigning students to the ISS Room is to keep them at school working on assignments, while at the same time encouraging them to reflect on their inappropriate behaviour. When assigned to the ISS room, students are supervised by a member of the school staff who ensures that there is a minimum of interaction among the students and that they complete work already assigned or work on grade-appropriate tasks that are stored in the room. In some cases, students have the option of working on letters of apology or “think papers” which encourage planning for improvement in their behaviour. Follow-up counselling or other support is provided by the classroom teacher or the school counsellor after the stay in the ISS room.

## Specialized or alternate programs

### S. J. Willis Educational Centre, Alternative School (Victoria, B.C.)

S. J. Willis is a grade 9–12 alternative secondary school that offers a number of options and services to help students who have opted out of or been referred from regular high schools. This program allows students to continue their education with a focus on developing skills for meeting their educational and career goals. The students who attend S. J. Willis have been unsuccessful in regular school settings, and in many cases have been suspended or asked to leave secondary schools across the city. At S. J. Willis, students in grades 9 through 12 can gain job skills by participating in work experience and specific employability skills certification programs. In addition, various support services—including counselling, tutoring, and life skills training—are an integral part of the program. This alternative delivery of educational programs is useful for students who have either been suspended or dropped out, providing them with another chance.

The S. J. Willis program and other alternate schools across B.C. are built on the concept that schools need to better understand some of the underlying factors affecting youth in order to retain students in the school system. Some of these alternate programs incorporate counselling and life skills training to help students change aggressive and disruptive behaviours, and endeavour to keep students connected to school programs.

*Alternate programs work in conjunction with other ministries and community agencies to provide support for students.*

### Open Learning Co-op (Duncan, B.C.)

The Open Learning Co-op (OLC) is an alternate secondary program for students who have not experienced success in the regular high school setting or are unable to attend a regular program because of personal circumstances. The program started with 60 students and had grown to 190 students in 1998. A self-paced curriculum enables students to work at their own speed. The program includes a discipline system based on an incentive token economy for appropriate behaviour. The OLC also works in conjunction with other ministries and community agencies to provide support for students in achieving their personal goals. The OLC helps students with transitions back into the secondary school in some cases.

Part of the program has included multicultural awareness training to help the students better understand and accept other cultures and tradi-

tions. Some of the students produced a video on anti-racism, which was presented in Vancouver at a National Anti-Racism Conference sponsored by Much Music. The conference included many stars and celebrities. The students won a prize for one of the top video presentations at the conference.

### **EQUIP—A Program for Youth with Aggressive Behaviours**

*In a youth correctional facility, the EQUIP group's recidivism rate was 15% after both six months and a year. The control group that did not have the EQUIP intervention had a recidivism rate of 30% at six months and 40% after one year.*



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Gibbs, et al., *The EQUIP Program: Teaching Youth to Think and Act Responsibly Through a Peer-Helping Approach* (Champaign, Ill.: Research Press, 1995).

EQUIP is a comprehensive intervention program designed to teach responsible thinking and behaviour to aggressive youth, and marketed by Research Press. It has been used successfully in youth detention facilities, and parts of the program have been implemented in school settings. Peer tutors help youth with anger management, social skills training, and problem solving. Belief in the positive potential of the youth is a key element of the program. Groups of seven to nine students meet for sessions each day for one hour to 90 minutes. Stories are shared and problems are discussed. An inventory of problems is recorded and students are taught alternative responses to use in problem situations. The students learn to identify situations by the generic problem types—dealing with authority figures, coping with criticism, managing anger, avoiding being led easily, addressing problems with lying, and so forth. Youth learn how to analyse situations before they become problematic. One of the main instructional strategies in EQUIP is role playing.

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# APPENDIX: SUSPENSION LEGISLATION IN CANADIAN PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

In 1998, all Canadian provinces and territories have legislation that gives school principals the power to suspend students. The length of suspensions principals may use varies across the country. In some provinces, the school district superintendent has the authority to suspend for a longer period or to expel a student permanently from a school. In others, the power to expel rests with the board of school trustees.

## Summary of Canadian School Acts by province and territory

Province	Individual School Level (Principal)	Superintendent/Director/ District Level Board
British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal may suspend</li> <li>• no guidelines for duration of suspension time (section 103)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• superintendent also has power to suspend</li> <li>• parents and students have the right to appeal to board of school trustees (section 11)</li> </ul>
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher may suspend from one class period</li> <li>• principal may suspend and reinstate students</li> <li>• for suspensions over five days, principal must inform board (section 19)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• board can reinstate or expel student</li> <li>• parents may have a hearing with the board before the final decision (section 19)</li> </ul>
Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal may suspend not more than three days without notice to the board</li> <li>• for more than three and up to 10 days, must be reported to the director (sections 153, 154)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• director has the authority to confirm, modify, or remove suspensions</li> <li>• board may suspend for up to one year</li> <li>• board has power to expel pupil or parent has the right to appeal to the board for a review of the decision</li> <li>• parent and student are entitled to mediation for conflict between student and school (sections 147, 153, 154)</li> </ul>

APPENDIX: SUSPENSION LEGISLATION IN  
CANADIAN PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

Province	Individual School Level (Principal)	Superintendent/Director/ District Level Board
Manitoba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher may suspend from class for up to two days</li> <li>• principal may suspend for no longer than six weeks in a district without a superintendent</li> <li>• in districts with a superintendent, a principal may suspend for up to a week without approval (sections 40.3, 40.5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• boards may give power to superintendent to limit principals to suspend for up to one week without approval</li> <li>• board may suspend or expel</li> <li>• parent may appeal decision of the principal or board (sections 40.5, 40.6, 40.8, 48)</li> </ul>
Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal must notify board supervisory officer of any suspension</li> <li>• principal may suspend to a maximum of 20 days (section 23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• board may expel or re-admit a student</li> <li>• pupil or parent may appeal suspension or expulsion to the board</li> <li>• if student is suspended the maximum days, or has multiple suspensions, a counsellor must review the case and inform the pupil/family of services to support the student (section 23)</li> </ul>
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no specific guidelines for principal to suspend (section 242)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• superintendent has power to expel after fair process to review each case and reports to youth protection (section 242)</li> </ul>
New Brunswick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal must notify director of all suspensions</li> <li>• principal can suspend for no longer than five days</li> <li>• review by director required for longer than five days (section 24)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• director reviews suspensions over five days or expulsions</li> <li>• parents may appeal decisions to the board (section 24)</li> </ul>

APPENDIX: SUSPENSION LEGISLATION IN  
CANADIAN PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

Province	Individual School Level (Principal)	Superintendent/Director/ District Level Board
Nova Scotia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal may suspend for not more than five days</li> <li>• must notify board of all suspensions (sections 122, 123, 124)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• board confirms or revokes suspensions or expulsions</li> <li>• board may continue a suspension from one year to the next if the suspension occurred within two months of the end of the previous school year</li> <li>• parents may request a review of a suspension by the board (section 124)</li> </ul>
Newfoundland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a teacher may suspend from a class in accordance with by-laws of the board</li> <li>• principal may suspend a pupil for a maximum of 30 school days in total in a school year</li> <li>• all suspensions must be reported to director</li> <li>• principal may extend suspension with approval of director (section 36)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• director may approve suspension over 30 days</li> <li>• director has authority to uphold, alter, or cancel a suspension (section 36)</li> </ul>
Prince Edward Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a teacher may suspend for up to one half instructional day</li> <li>• principal or superintendent may suspend without notice to the board for up to five days</li> <li>• requires board approval to extend (section 74)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• superintendent reports to the board</li> <li>• board may suspend or expel</li> <li>• board provides a hearing to appeal suspensions or expulsions (sections 74, 75)</li> </ul>
Yukon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal may suspend for no longer than 10 days</li> <li>• principal must notify the superintendent and the board (section 41)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• board approval required for suspension exceeding 10 days (section 41)</li> </ul>
Northwest Territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principal may suspend</li> <li>• principal must notify the District Education Authority, school counsellor and superintendent of suspensions exceeding five days</li> <li>• when a student is suspended more than once during the school year, a counsellor reviews the circumstances (sections 34 , 35)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District Education Authority may expel pending fair process (section 36)</li> </ul>



# READER RESPONSE FORM

## How Can We Improve This Resource Guide?

We hope this resource guide is helpful for users considering issues related to school suspension. Since the users of any manual are often the ones best able to identify its strengths and weaknesses, please let us know your impressions of the usefulness of the resource and how it can be improved. If you have any suggestions or comments, please complete a copy of this page and send it to the Special Programs Branch of the Ministry of Education.

**Return to:**  
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**PO BOX 9165 STN PROV**  
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**Victoria BC V8W 9H4**

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1. Useful?

YES       NO

Please explain:

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2. Easy to understand?

YES       NO

Please explain:

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3. Well organized?

YES       NO

Please explain:

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4. Complete?

YES       NO

Please explain:

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**OTHER COMMENTS:**

