

Innovative Programs to Reduce Out of School Suspensions

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The PIRATE Program

Program Description:

- The **Personal Interpersonal Relationships Aiming Towards Enhancement (PIRATE) Program** is a three-day after school alternative to out-of-school suspension program for high school students in an urban community.
- The *PIRATE Program* was developed by School Based Health Center (SBHC) Social Worker (LCSW) in collaboration with the Dean of Students to address verbal and physical altercations among students. The original program was only open to female students, but was later expanded to include male students.



Program Goals:

- Offer students an alternative to suspension to keep them in school so that they do not fall behind academically
- Teach students new coping skills to better resolve conflict in the future
- Provide students with ongoing social work support as needed.

Program Days/Times:

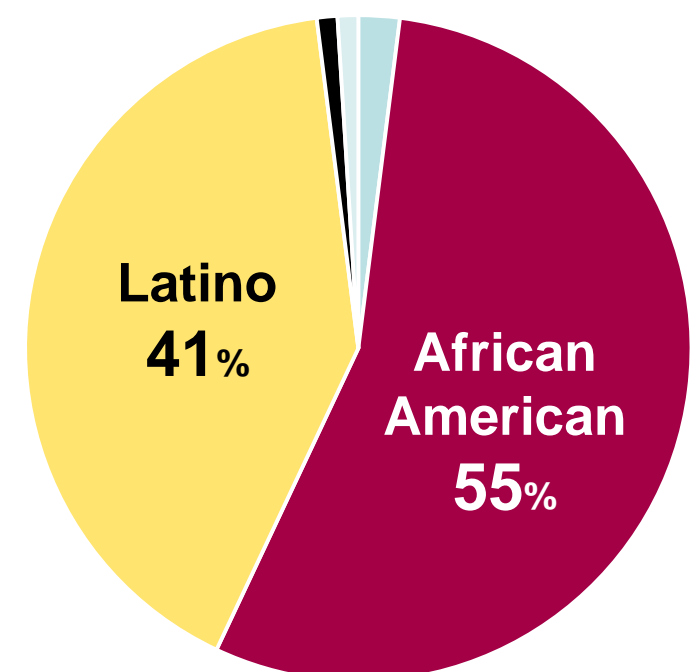
- Afterschool
- 3 days/week
- 45 minute sessions

Program Topics:

- Conflict resolution
- Anger management
- Coping skills
- Relaxation Techniques

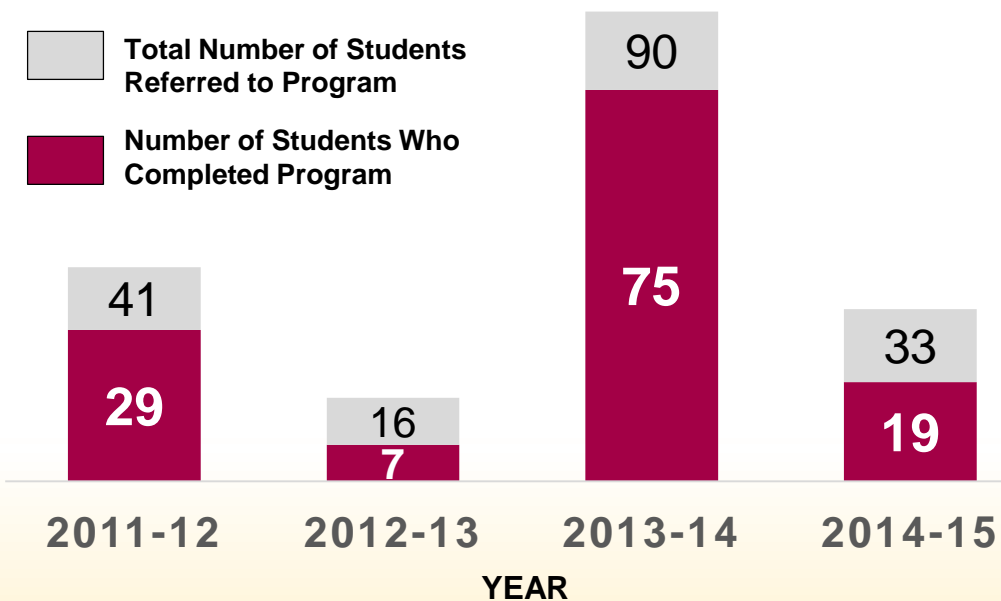


School Demographics



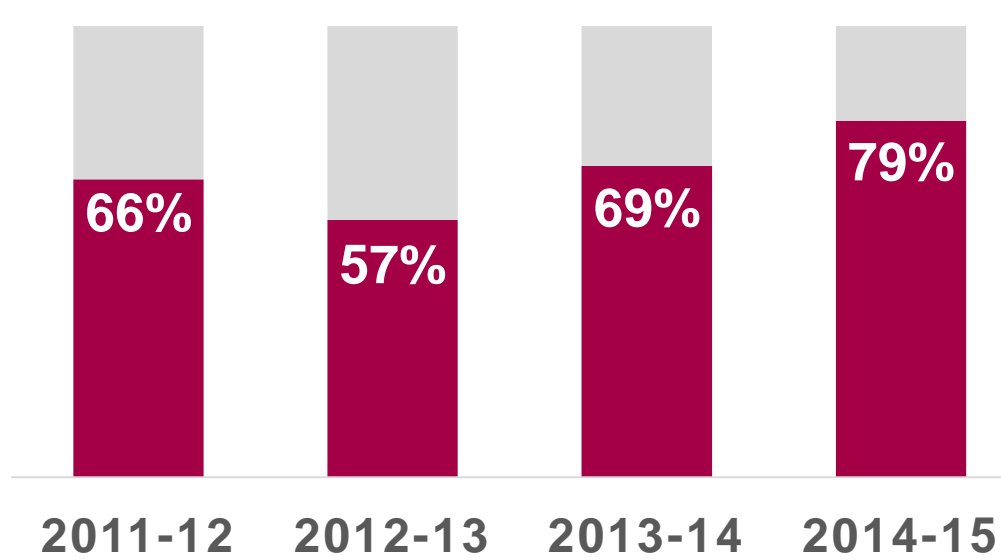
Referrals And Results

NUMBER OF STUDENTS REFERRED AND WHO COMPLETED PROGRAM



Disciplinary Issues Results

% OF STUDENTS WITH NO FURTHER DISCIPLINARY ISSUES, BY YEAR



The R.E.A.L. Program

Program Description:

- The **Real Education About Life (REAL) Program** is a separate intervention incorporated into the dedicated in-school suspension (ISS) classroom. *REAL* provides students with social emotional learning to help them avoid further disciplinary action.
- The program consists of an in-school suspension reflection form, individual processing with the Social Worker, and a 45 minute lesson on topics including:

- Healthy Relationships
- Anger Management
- Substance Use/Abuse
- Life Skills
- Stress Management



Program Goals:

- Provide students with an opportunity to process the incident through completion of the in-school suspension reflection form. This form is reviewed by the ISS teacher and SBHC LCSW
- Teach students new skills through classroom presentations and discussion
- Increase student access to SBHC LCSW and medical providers
- Decrease out-of-school suspensions in order to keep students in school.

Challenges & Barriers

- Ever-changing group of students
- Changes in ISS school staff
- Varying amounts of time students assigned to ISS intervention (i.e. 1 class period, vs. all day, vs. several days)
- Students are sent to ISS throughout the school day; sometimes disrupting the *REAL* social-emotional presentation/discussion
- High numbers of special education students mixed in with general education students
- Students refuse to complete the *REAL/ISS* Reflection Form
- Students not motivated to participate in *REAL* discussion
- Students are sent back to Deans of Students by school staff if behavior is disruptive during the program
- Students are not following the regular ISS rules
- Lack of support from substitute teachers
- Students not receiving their homework throughout the day.

Evaluation & Feedback

Qualitative Evaluation: Student feedback on *REAL* program; ISS school staff feedback and suggestions; administrator and Deans of Students feedback and suggestions.

Planned Future Evaluation: Pre/post tests for each *REAL* subject area and exercise; satisfaction surveys; percent of students who are repeatedly sent to ISS.

Conclusion

Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Suspensions have been linked to lower academic performance, high rates of dropouts, failure to graduate on time, decreased academic engagement, and further disciplinary issues. Avoiding suspension and teaching new skills is an evidence-informed way to help students stay in school and achieve.

The *PIRATE* and *REAL* programs are innovative interventions which provide necessary support for at-risk high school students. The *PIRATE* program has served 130 students in the last four school years. The *REAL* program annually serves over 350 students at risk for out-of-school suspension.

Student program participants frequently seek out the SBHC LCSW if upset or angry in order to avoid additional conflicts. They have benefited by not missing additional days of school by avoiding out-of-school suspension. Student participants have an increased awareness of the School Based Health Center and are more likely to use the full range of medical, nutrition, and mental health services offered.

References

- U.S. Department of Education, School Climate and Discipline (2015). *Rethinking Discipline*.
- The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2014). *The School Discipline Census Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engage in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System*.