



Opportunity Suspended: How Integrated Student Supports Promotes Positive School Discipline and Behavior

Nearly three million U.S. students are suspended from their schools every year—with approximately half suspended more than once. One result of this discipline is the loss of an estimated 18 million days of instruction.¹ For students struggling to overcome poverty, crime, and trauma, inequity in discipline only widens the already-existing opportunity gap. Students who are suspended have lower grades, lower standardized test scores and are less likely to graduate than their peers. Beyond school, the impact of suspensions can result in longer-term negative life outcomes, including increased victimization, criminal involvement, underemployment, and incarceration.²

Integrated student supports can be a strong support to schools that are interested in adopting or are already adopting positive school discipline practices. Integrated student supports delivers a full range of needs—from working with families and elementary school students to establish healthy behaviors, to teaching conflict resolution skills and facilitating peer mediation programs in middle schools, as well as running restorative circles in high school that remediate conflict and repair student/teacher and student/student relationships, to reintegrating a suspended or expelled student back into school.

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On-site coordinators ensure that integration. They work directly inside K-12 public schools to identify needs of students and connect them with the appropriate supports, when they need them. Whether it’s building strong relationships with students, helping build positive responses to trauma, developing social and emotional skills, or connecting them to mental health services, these designated site coordinators are trained to effectively assess and address student needs.

¹The Center for Civil Rights Remedies (2015) Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?

²ChangeLab Solutions (2019) School Discipline Practices: A Public Health Crisis and an Opportunity for Reform.

³Moore, K.A. (2014). Making The Grade: Assessing the Evidence for integrated student supports. Child Trends. Retrieved from: <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-07ISSPaper2.pdf>

⁴Integrated student supports are often referred to as wraparound services or a multi-tiered system of support.

Integrated Student Supports Model: Communities In Schools

Building healthy relationships between students and caring adults is at the core of the Communities In Schools model. Through these relationships, CIS site coordinators, volunteers, and partners work directly with students to develop the social and emotional competencies and skills that lead to improved behavior and school engagement.

Communities In Schools® (CIS™), the largest provider of integrated student supports, serves 1.6 million students in 2,500 schools and 370 school districts across the U.S. Among its case-managed students, 92 percent of CIS students met their behavior goals for the 2017-18 school year. CIS students are also showing improvement in additional indicators of success: 99 percent remained in school through the end of the school year; 96 percent of seniors graduated or received a GED; 95 percent were promoted to the next grade level; 89 percent met their academic goals; and 80 percent met attendance goals.

Recommendations for State Policy

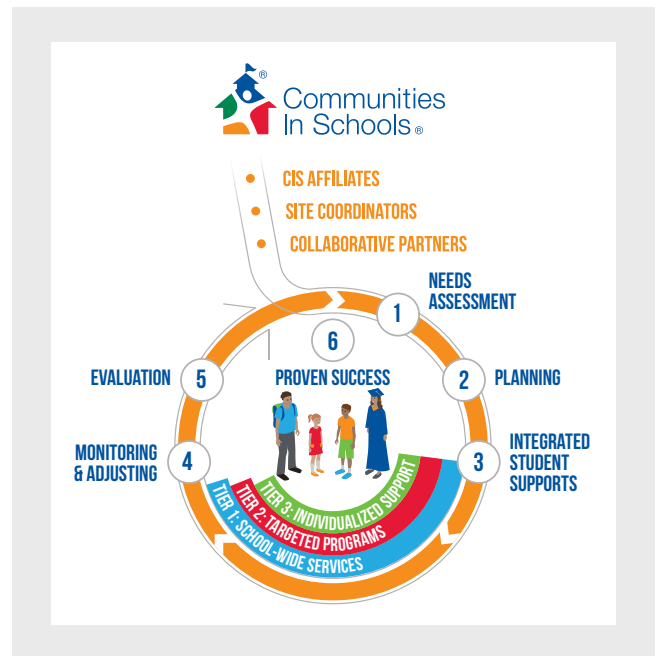
Young people today face a wide range of challenges, including depression, anxiety, and exposure to trauma, all often related to behavioral issues.⁵ But when these young people are empowered with the appropriate supports to address these challenges and are provided with the necessary social and emotional skills to self-regulate behavior, the need for disciplinary referrals can be reduced.

State policymakers can help by providing a balanced approach—supporting laws that limit the use of exclusionary discipline while also supporting schools' capacity to foster safe and productive learning environments. Policymakers can contribute by supporting school-based efforts to provide students with trauma-informed care that builds protective factors like social and emotional skills and strong relationships with adults.

- **Strengthen reporting requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act by including both regular disaggregation and analysis of student behavior and discipline rate data.** The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)⁶ requires states and districts to produce report cards that include disaggregated data about school disciplinary actions. However, schools and districts may not regularly analyze that data to identify patterns and areas for improvement. Annual reporting of data is not enough. Better analysis will give school leaders the insights to make data-driven decisions that deliver more effective use of disciplinary actions.
- **Establish a statewide protocol for implementing integrated student supports.** Research shows that quality of implementation is critical to long-term student outcomes. State policymakers can ensure high-quality implementation by establishing a protocol that defines essential practices for each component, provides guardrails, and defines outcomes.
- **Include a non-academic needs assessment in Comprehensive Support and Improvement plans.** ESSA requires school districts to develop and implement plans for Comprehensive Support and Improvement.⁷ Plans are based on a school-level needs assessment. This assessment should address both the academic and non-academic needs. A non-academic needs assessment makes school plans more effective. It provides the actionable data school leaders need to target school safety and climate issues that impede student learning.
- **Include a non-academic needs assessment for Targeted Support and Improvement plans.** ESSA does not require that schools identified for Targeted Support and Improvement perform a needs assessment.⁸ States and districts should support a needs assessment that examines both academic and non-academic factors. To effectively address non-academic factors, states should issue guidance and provide a template for all schools.

States that are developing integrative policies to serve children, should consider working with school districts and schools to implement integrated student supports. Integrated student supports can improve conditions for learning by engaging teachers, families, school staff, and communities to provide a network of support for children. Research shows that, when well implemented, this approach can promote the success of individual students and create the type of supportive learning environment that enables all students to thrive.⁹

For additional information, please contact Tiffany Miller, Vice President of Policy, at millert@cisnet.org.



⁵ SAMHSA and The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2016). Understanding Child Trauma.

⁶ Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177. Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/essa-act-of-1965.pdf>

⁷ Under ESSA, states must identify schools for Comprehensive Support and Improvement, including the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools, high schools with graduation rates less than 67 percent, and schools in which at least one subgroup is consistently underperforming. Districts will be responsible for developing plans to improve student outcomes in the identified schools, which must then be approved by the state.

⁸ Under ESSA, schools will be identified for Targeted Support and Improvement when subgroups of students are significantly and consistently low-performing, as defined by the state. Schools will develop plans to improve the outcomes of low-performing students, which must be approved by the district.

⁹ Moore, K.A. (2014); Moore, K.A., Lantos, H., Jones, R., Schindler, A., Belford, J., & Sacks, V. (December 2017).