



## **Alternatives-to-Suspension Grants Cohort One: Outcomes and Lessons Learned-Year 3**

*“This grant was very important to helping change our culture and we appreciate the opportunity to have been part of the community that explored these alternatives.” ~Jane Holmberg, Intermediate School District 287, Director of Teaching and Learning*

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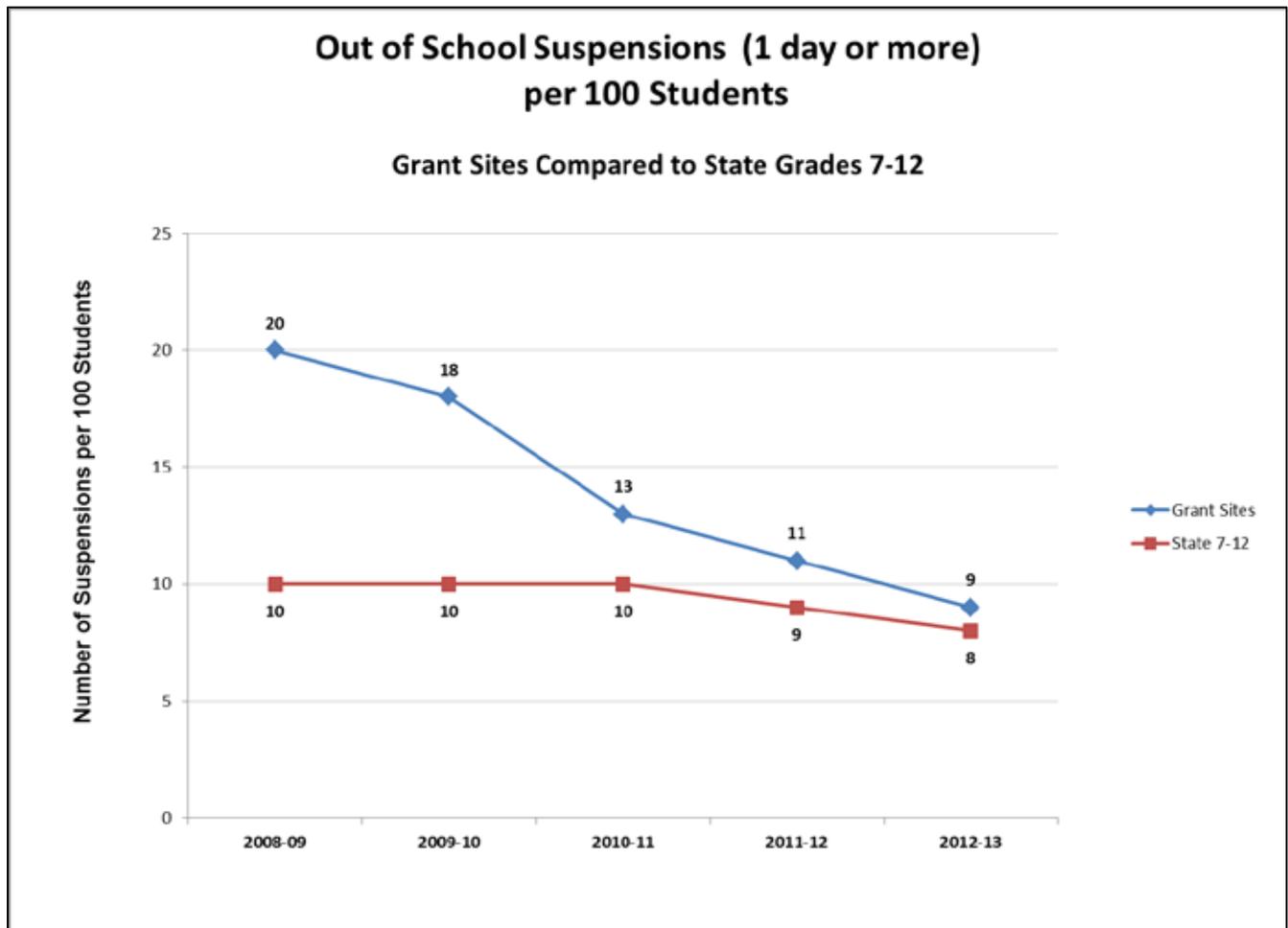
## Introduction

In 2009-2010, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) awarded grant funds to five school districts to develop alternatives-to-suspension programs and implement interventions that reduce the need for suspension as a response to disciplinary incidents. All of the original grantees continued through year three of the grant. Grant sites implemented a variety of research-based interventions ranging from Restorative Justice Circles to Second Step social emotional curriculum.

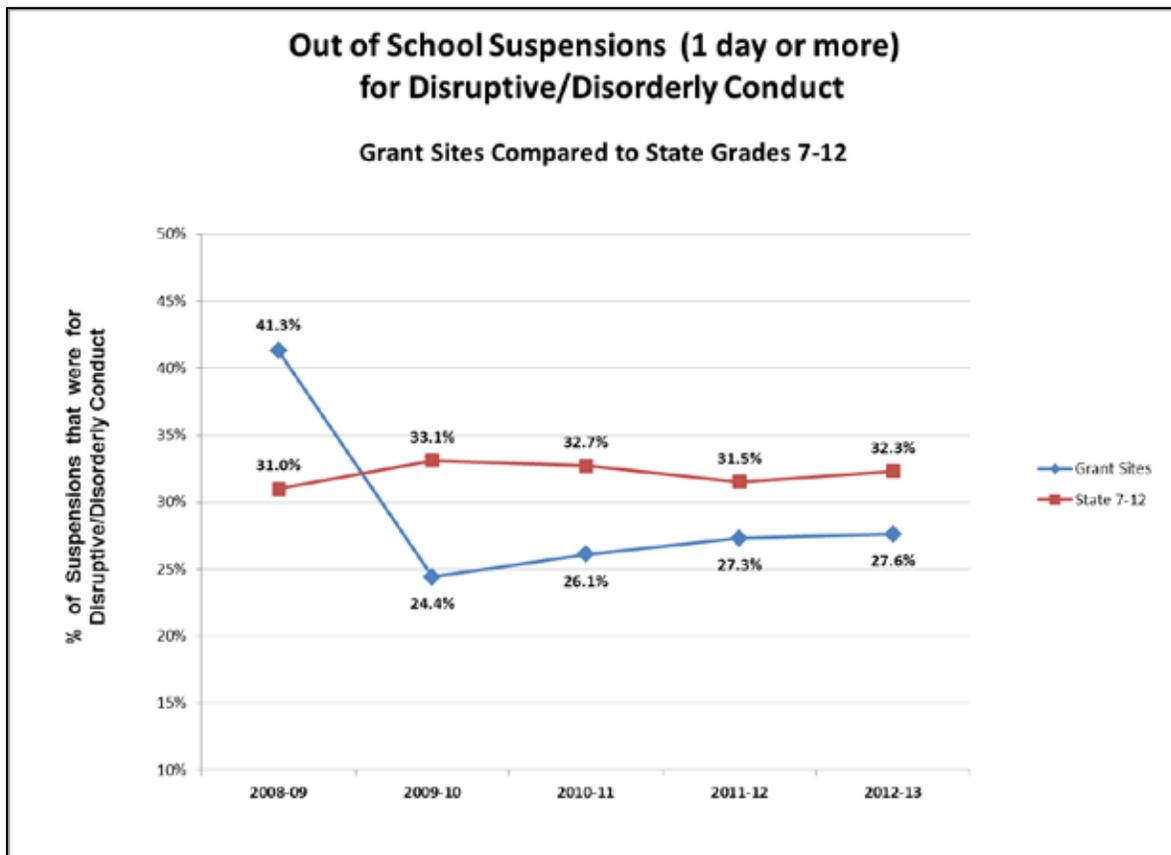
## Results

Discipline data showed that grantees were successful in significantly reducing out-of-school (OSS) suspensions from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013.

- On average, grantees decreased the number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) by 55 percent. This is compared to the state suspension rate decrease of approximately 2 percent.
- The grant sites reduced the number of suspensions of one day or more for disruptive/disorderly conduct/insubordination from 41.3 percent in 2008-2009 to 27.6 percent in 2012-2013. Conversely, the state suspension rate increased for disruptive/disorderly conduct/insubordination behaviors by 1.3 percent.
- One year after grant ended, grant sites continued to reduce the use of OSS as a response to behavioral issues.



In addition, grantees significantly reduced the proportion of suspensions for the most commonly suspended category of behavior disruptive/disorderly conduct. Grantees decreased the proportion of suspensions from 41.3 percent in 2008-2009 to 27.6 percent in 2012-2013 while there was an increase in out of school suspensions of one day more throughout the state from 31 percent to 32.3 percent during the same years.

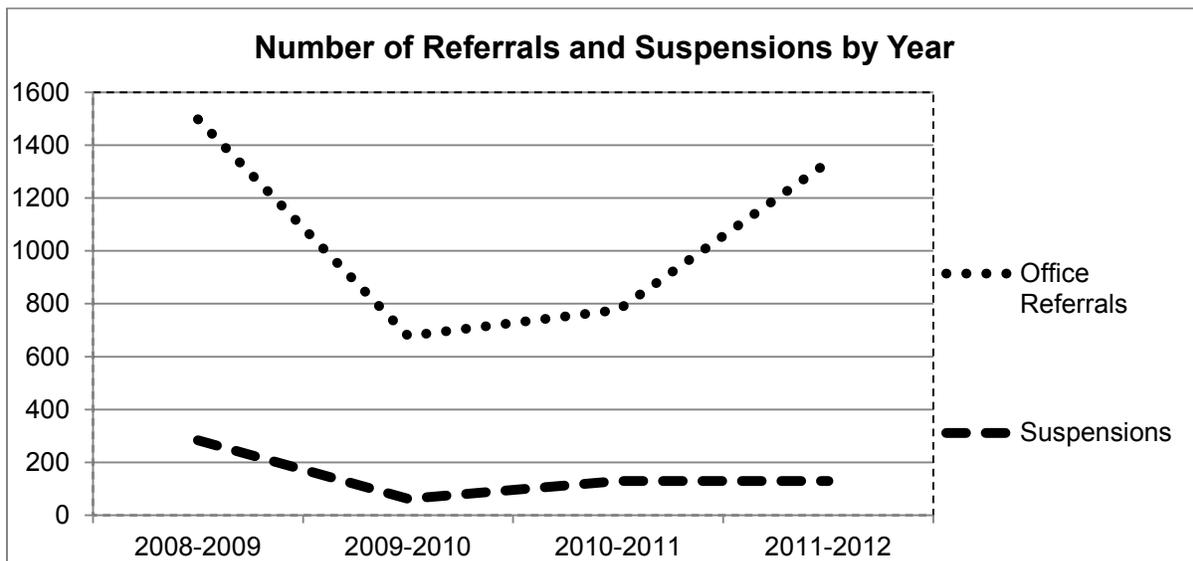


Statewide discipline data shows that the grant sites demonstrated significantly fewer suspensions than the rest of the state, suggesting that the Alternatives-to-Suspension Grant was successful in assisting schools to develop alternatives-to-suspension.

### **Burnsville-Savage-Eagan School District – Eagle Ridge Junior High School**

The Eagle Ridge Junior High School (ERJH) team developed evening classes and Saturday school as alternatives to suspension. There, the specific skill deficits and behavioral issues that contributed to students’ misbehavior were addressed. The ERJH team also developed culturally diverse after-school activities and neighborhood forums designed to increase school connectedness and positive parent engagement. Their work has resulted in a 78 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions over five years.

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
<b>Office Discipline Referrals</b>	1498	678	777	1337
<b>Out of School Suspensions</b>	286	59	129	135
<b>Percent of Suspensions served by minority students</b>	77 %	62 %	49%	67.5%
<b>Evening classes (number of students)</b>		22	4	
<b>Saturday school (number of students)</b>		75	36	35



In the school year prior to the implementation of the alternatives-to-suspension grant, 77 percent of the suspensions were for students of color. The next year, that number dropped to 62 percent and then the following year to 49 percent. The 28 percent decrease in percentage of students of color suspended in a three-year time period indicates that the alternatives-to-suspension grant has had an impact. Building out-of-school suspension data indicated that 49 percent of the students suspended in 2010-2011 were students receiving special education services. In 2011-2012, that percent grew to 67.5 percent, but remains lower than prior to the start of the grant.

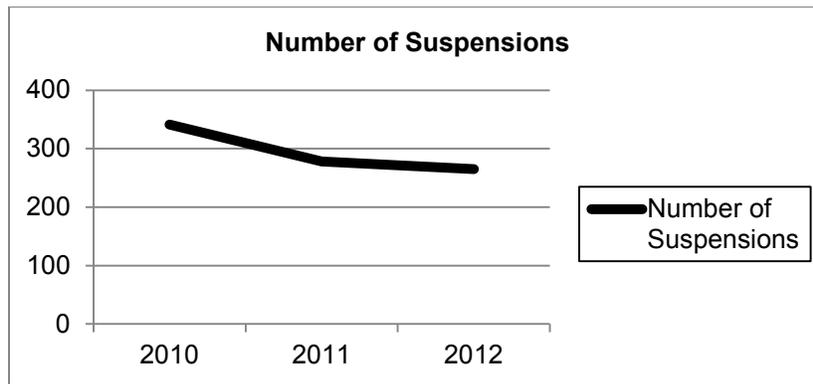
During the third year of the grant (2011-2012), staff at Eagle Ridge Junior High (ERJH) began Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) training. As a part of PBIS, a core team, met quarterly to review progress and make adjustments. All staff and students were trained on the PBIS matrix of building expectations the first week of school with “booster trainings” throughout the year. Staff also attended Love and Logic training. In an effort to decrease the disproportionate number of minority students being suspended, 23 staff attended Beyond Diversity Training. In addition, a diversity student mentor program was implemented. Staff also provided biweekly mentoring to students

who were at risk. Finally, Saturday School continued to serve as an alternative to suspension.

**Contact:** Cherie Braspenick, Associate Principal (952) 707-2821  
[cbraspenick@burnsville.k12.mn.us](mailto:cbraspenick@burnsville.k12.mn.us)

### **Columbia Heights Public Schools – Columbia Academy (Central Middle School)**

Columbia Academy reported that during the third year of the Alternatives-to-Suspension grant, fewer behavioral referrals resulted in administrators having more time to devote to curriculum and other goals. They reported that the training on Developmental Designs, Check & Connect, Peer Mediation, Restorative Justice and Second Step led to positive results.



Building discipline data results indicated that out-of-school suspensions decreased from 341 in 2010 to 278 in 2011. The total number of days of out-of-school suspension also decreased 745 days in 2010 to 684 days in 2011. However, office discipline referrals during that same time increased from 1490 incident reports in 2010 to 2244 incident reports in 2011. Staff continued to track suspension numbers on a monthly basis throughout 2011-2012. Results indicate a 5 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions, meeting the team's goal.

During year three of the grant (2011-2012), select school staff received several trainings. All staff received training in cultural diversity. A smaller diversity training team attended additional intensive 8-week training. In addition, select staff attended intensive training in Aggression Replacement Training (ART). Finally, select staff received training in Yoga Calm, which was implemented in the winter and spring. Due to the success of Yoga Calm, the district sponsored additional trainings that would allow two staff to become certified trainers for the district.

The Columbia Heights team reported that this was one of the most successful grants they have received. They indicated that having the grant for three years was important because years two and three of the grant were the most successful. The grant provided for additional training and programs that will be sustainable for years to come. The team plans on expanding Yoga Calm to the elementary and high schools. In addition, they will continue with Aggression Replacement Training and cultural diversity training.

**Contact:** Richard Hamann, Student Services Coordinator (763) 528-4428  
[HamannR@colheights.k12.mn.us](mailto:HamannR@colheights.k12.mn.us)

## Intermediate School Districts 287 and 916 – Alternative Learning Centers

Intermediate District 287 and Northeast Metro 916 operate four Area Learning Centers (ALCs) for students in grades 9 -12, at risk of not graduating from high school. The primary focus of the Alternatives-to-Suspension grant project is decreasing out-of-school suspensions by implementing a Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Model.

The very criteria that allow students to attend an ALC can be associated with common reasons for suspension. These criteria include difficulties with academics, mental health problems, physical or sexual abuse, homelessness and exclusion or expulsion from school. Students who meet these criteria often lack support systems and exhibit poor judgment, poor social perception, and aggressive behaviors that trigger inappropriate behaviors in school that result in out-of-school suspensions. Many have failed in their former high school programs, have a history of frequent out-of-school suspensions, and some have been expelled.

Suspension data for the ALCs revealed disturbing trends when the CPS program was first started. ALC students were suspended for offenses such as fighting, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, disruptive or disorderly conduct and insubordination. Suspensions in the categories of insubordination and disruptive behavior have been virtually eliminated at the ALC sites.

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-12	2012-13
Out-of-School Suspensions	39	36	15	14	7

The core belief of the CPS approach is that if a youth **could** do well they **would** do well. CPS teaches adults and youth that challenging behavior is a result of lagging skills and unsolved problems and that challenging behavior occurs **when the demands of the environment exceed a person's capacity to respond adaptively**. In the CPS approach there are three ways to try to solve problems: Plan A - unilateral problem solving), Plan B - identifying the unsolved problems that are precipitating the challenging episodes by expressing empathy and drilling down for information to develop an understanding the person's concern or perspective and by selecting high-priority issues to address together, and Plan C - dropping the problem completely. With CPS, the focus is on the things that a person can actually do something about, things that can actually be worked on. Dr. Ross Greene provided advanced training on the CPS model for experienced staff during the spring of 2012. Staff has and will continue to provide consultation to staff who did not receive the advanced training.

The Intermediate districts created a core team of four administrators to complete several evaluation activities. First, they conducted focus groups with staff to evaluate their confidence to address the most difficult behaviors leading to suspension. Second, they analyzed the following data: suspension rates over time, attendance rates, graduation rates, and student achievement. Finally, they reviewed examples of students using critical thinking on classroom assignments.

The Intermediate districts continue to implement the CPS program and support the capacity of all staff to address the most challenging behaviors and student skill

deficiencies through curricular activities. The goal is to further reduce out-of-school suspensions for even the most egregious behaviors.

The Intermediate districts reported that the periodic grant meetings with other grantees statewide to hear about other projects and outcomes were very helpful. They indicated that they would like to network with and receive information from other teams working to reduce out-of-school suspensions to continue reducing out-of-school suspensions.

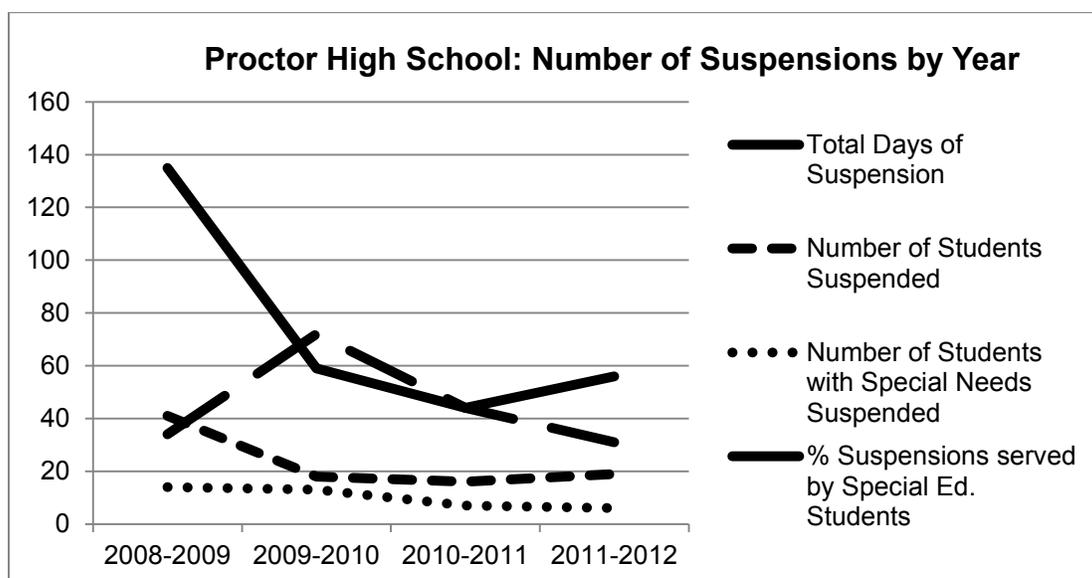
Contact: Lea Dahl, Principal (763) 550-7114

[LLDahl@district287.org](mailto:LLDahl@district287.org)

## Proctor Public Schools – Proctor Secondary Schools

Proctor Secondary School (PSS) educates 607 9th-12th grade students in northeastern Minnesota. School records show that prior to 2009, the number of Proctor secondary students who had been suspended was higher than the state average and overrepresented students receiving special education services and male students. Since the award of Alternatives-to-Suspension grant and development of the Respect and Peace in Schools (RAPs) the number of students suspended has decreased from 41 to 19 and the number of days of suspension from 135 to 56.

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
<b>Total Days of Suspension</b>	135	59	44	56
<b>Number of students suspended</b>	41	18	16	19
<b>Number of students with special needs suspended</b>	14	13	9	6
<b>Average Number of Days Suspended</b>	3.30	3.27	2.75	



PPS uses the Restorative Circle process, Developmental Designs by Origins, the Minds of Boys book, the Menu of Restorative Measures and some of the Navigation 101 curriculum with the five social emotional competencies as a focus to maintain a positive classroom and school environment. During the 2011-2012 school year, the assistant principal convened 20 Restorative Circles involving 42 students with the results being promising in terms of students taking ownership for their behaviors and developing compassion for others.

PSS decreased the disparity of suspensions for male students and for students with special needs. The percent of suspensions that were for males decreased from 79 percent in 2009-2010, to 53 percent in 2011-2012. The percent of suspensions that were for students with special needs decreased from 72 percent in 2009-2010 to 31 percent in 2011-2012. To address this disparity, all staff had received training about the overrepresentation of males and students with special needs in suspension and practices that can reduce those disparities. In addition, all staff received copies of the book Minds of Boys.

The district discipline policy was changed to reflect the restorative approach. The RAPS coordinator convened four student focus groups to refine the menu of restorative actions and a “restorative court” process. Students observed court proceedings to understand how the justice system works. Once the Student Court is trained, they will review behavioral incidences (anonymously) and then make restorative choice recommendations. If the offender completes the recommendations, the case will be closed. If the offender chooses not to complete the recommendations, a counterproposal may be reviewed by the Student Court to determine next steps.

PSS tracked the academic performance and behavior indicators for the students involved in the RAPS program and for whom longitudinal data was available. Data showed that the following for students who were involved in the RAPS program in the 2011-2012 school year:

- 50 percent improved their GPA.
- 41 percent decreased behavior incidents.
- 77 percent demonstrated improved mental health functioning.
- 44 percent decreased involvement in conflicts.
- 45 percent showed an increase in physical fitness.
- 75 percent showed an increase in sense of career direction.
- 79 percent showed an increased connection to the community.

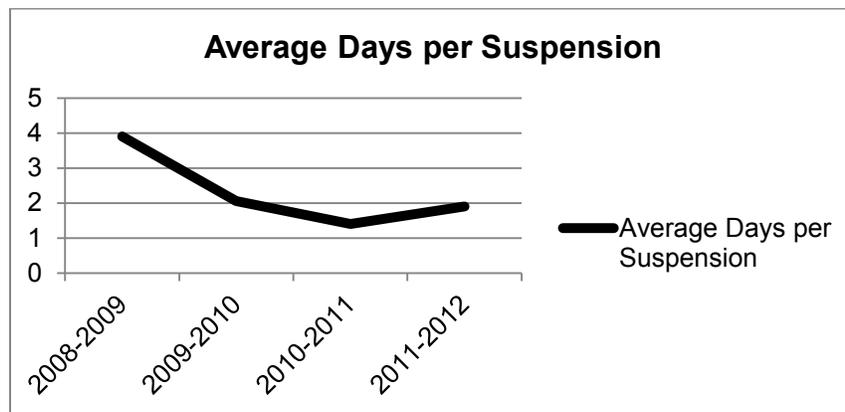
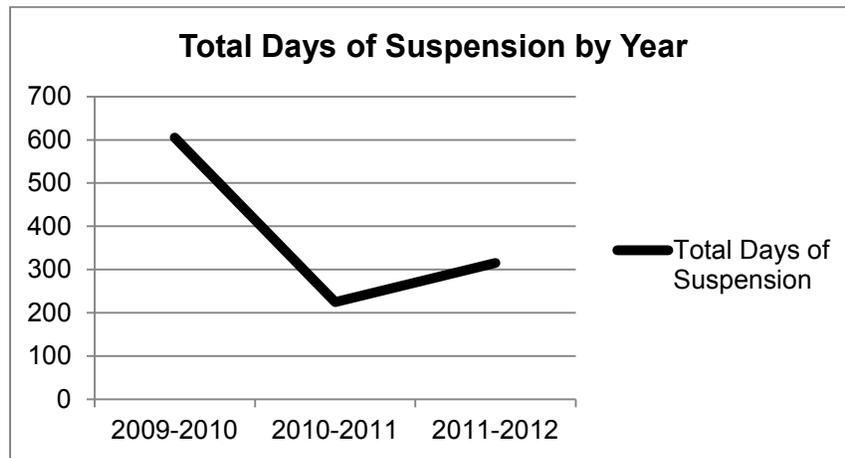
PSS has implemented a set of restorative practices, engaged in professional learning community activities and engaged students in the development of restorative action planning choices. These practices will continue after the completion of the grant.

Contact: Nancy Litman, Principal (218) 628-4926 x 1003  
[nlitman@proctor.k12.mn.us](mailto:nlitman@proctor.k12.mn.us)

## **South Washington Public Schools – Park High School**

The **Successful Alternative Supports (SAS)** grant project at Park High School (PHS) has demonstrated positive outcomes after the three years of implementation despite major changes in administration during the 2012-2013 school year. In the first two years, PHS met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all subgroups on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II (MCAII), closed the gender gap in reading, and

increased math scores. PHS had the highest percentage of students passing the GRAD writing exam among the three district high schools. PHS has included a goal in the school improvement plan (SIP) goal to reduce out-of-school suspensions and improve school climate. PHS has also demonstrated a decline in number of suspensions and number of days of suspension:



The number of office referrals decreased substantially from 294 referrals in 2009-10 to 161 in 2010-2011. The average number of days a student was suspended per incident dropped almost 50 percent from 3.9 days prior to the grant to 1.9 days during the 2011-2012 school year.

The research-based interventions that have been implemented as alternatives-to-suspension include: 1) a restorative justice process known as Peer C.O.R. and 2) The Social Skills and Aggression Replacement Training (START) program to help students re-think their actions in conflict situations. In 2010-2011, the SAS program adopted a ninth grade guidance program; Career Choices. The team believes that when students are engaged in their learning, recognize the value of their education, and start high school with the end in mind; they are much less likely to engage in inappropriate behaviors in school.

PHS staff report that the interventions, training and tools made available through the grant have made a positive difference in meeting the educational needs of at-risk students. However, the number of behavioral referrals still remains high, specifically within the “Other” category. The SAS team focused on improving the positive culture of the school, continuing to implement suspension alternatives, and targeting ninth grade

students in an effort to keep at-risk students in school and provide more productive teaching opportunities leading to student success.

To understand staff and student perceptions of school culture, the PHS team modified and implemented a PBIS survey. A total of 1,446 students and 84 staff completed the survey. Results were shared with the entire staff and were used for planning staff development for the 2012-2013 school year. PHS implemented a number of trainings including research from Anthony Mohammed on problem solving and a book study on increasing student learning. Due to a change in administration, less staff meeting time was available for the purpose of improving school culture. However, each staff meeting devoted a portion of time to the building's culture. Topics included the consistency of rule setting, problem solving, and team building. Staff development was infused in team meetings that were already being held such as Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), staff meetings, and ninth grade meetings.

Contact: Tanya Holub, School Psychologist, (651)768-3715  
[tholub@sowashco.k12.mn.us](mailto:tholub@sowashco.k12.mn.us)

## Conclusion

As evidenced by this report, the grantees have sustained and improved their alternatives-to-suspension projects and have gained valuable knowledge about the implementation and the impact of the alternatives-to-suspension program in their schools. Grantees have developed strategies to use data to inform their program design and monitor effectiveness. In Year Three of the grant, the focus has shifted to embedding the alternatives-to-suspension practices into school policy and daily interaction between staff and student and families.

## Resources from the Minnesota Department of Education

### **Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheet: Outcomes of Out-of-School Suspension**

Evidence from many studies suggests that out-of-school suspension is not effective in deterring behavior problems, and instead, is linked to harmful effects on schools and youth.

### **Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheet: Effective Classroom Management Practices**

Effective classroom management strategies help to prevent student misbehavior and missed instructional time due to disciplinary practices such as out-of-school suspensions and have an impact on instruction and student achievement.

### **Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheet: Multi-Tiered System of Support to Reduce Out-of-School Suspensions**

To reduce the use of suspension, educators must develop evidence-based practices to actively teach and reinforce positive student behavior and to address the underlying reasons for misbehavior.

[Fact sheets may be found on the MDE website](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/SpecEdClass/BehavAssessInterv/index.html)

(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/SpecEdClass/BehavAssessInterv/index.html>).

### **Dangerous Weapons and Disciplinary Incidents Report**

Minnesota Statute Section 121A.06, Subdivision 3, requires the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to annually report on disciplinary incidents, and incidents involving dangerous weapons, that occur in Minnesota public schools. [Data for this report were obtained from MDE's Disciplinary Incident Report System \(DIRS\)](#) (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/Legis/LegisRep/index.html>).

### **SNAPSHOTS on Minnesota Youth**

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Department of Public Safety (DPS) have developed a series of reports about Minnesota's young people. [Each Snapshot focuses on issues facing Minnesota youth](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/statistical-analysis-center/Pages/snapshots-minnesota-youth.aspx) (<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/statistical-analysis-center/Pages/snapshots-minnesota-youth.aspx>).

### **School Climate**

[MDE provides information and technical assistance to school districts regarding school climate, classroom management, and youth development](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/SchSaf/SchClimate/index.html). Positive school climate intersects with attendance, transition and academic concerns as well as violence prevention, bullying prevention and school safety (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/SchSaf/SchClimate/index.html>).

**Restorative Measures**

[MDE helps schools develop programming, curricula and intervention practices to create safe schools by teaching social skills, building positive school climate and repairing harm when it happens](#). Restorative measures are discipline interventions to hold

student accountable for harm and address the needs of students or staff harmed and the needs of the school community

(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/SafeSch/RestorMeas/>).

For more information please contact Cindy Shevlin-Woodcock (651) 582-8656

[cindy.shevlin-woodcock@state.mn.us](mailto:cindy.shevlin-woodcock@state.mn.us)

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