THE GOOD SCHOOLS SEMINARS

CREATING SAFE & SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS II: NEXT STEPS

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SESSION VI: DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN

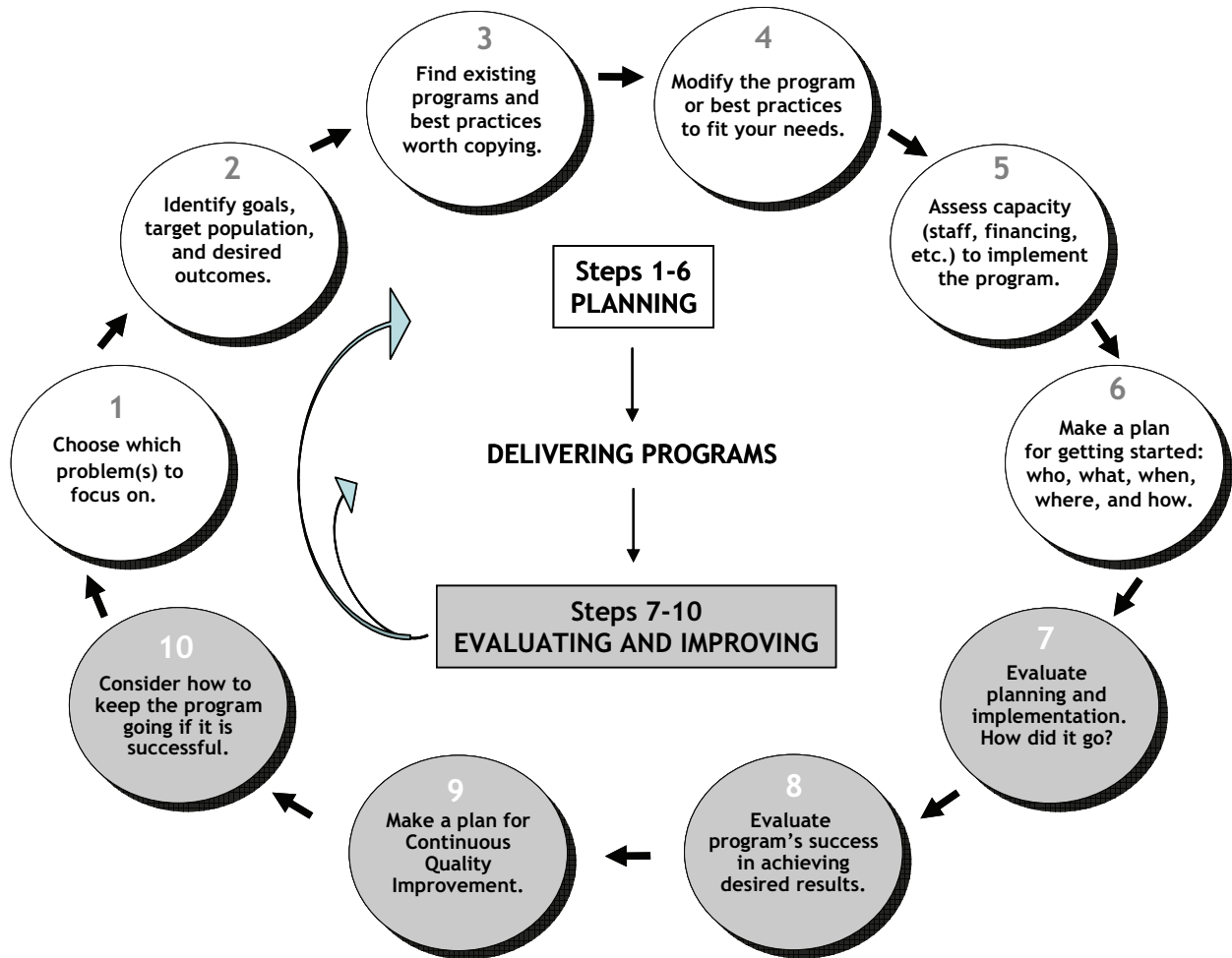***Getting To Outcomes: 10 Steps for Achieving Results-Based Accountability***
Shelley Wiseman, Matthew Chinman, Patricia A. Ebener, Sarah Hunter, Pamela Imm & Abraham Wandersman, Rand Corporation (2007)

This 1-pager from a Rand report provides a useful visual for the process of developing an achievable strategic plan.

***Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline: An Educator's Action Planning Guide/* Creating An Action Plan**
safesupportivelearning.ed.gov (2015)

The 10 Steps

3
Find existing programs and best practices worth copying.

4
Modify the program or best practices to fit your needs.

2
Identify goals, target population, and desired outcomes.

5
Assess capacity (staff, financing, etc.) to implement the program.

**Steps 1-6
PLANNING**

1
Choose which problem(s) to focus on.

DELIVERING PROGRAMS

6
Make a plan for getting started: who, what, when, where, and how.

**Steps 7-10
EVALUATING AND IMPROVING**

10
Consider how to keep the program going if it is successful.

7
Evaluate planning and implementation. How did it go?

9
Make a plan for Continuous Quality Improvement.

8
Evaluate program's success in achieving desired results.

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Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline

An Educator's Action Planning Guide

STAGE 3: CREATING AN ACTION PLAN
How will you address the root causes of disparities in school discipline?

BACKGROUND

Now you're ready to use what you've learned about who is being disparately disciplined and the associated processes and drivers to develop an action plan for making changes to reduce—and eventually eliminate—disparities. Your plan of action also will describe how your school or district will monitor your plans and regularly revisit data collection so you can continuously improve your efforts and sustain them over time.

Many schools and districts already are deeply engaged in changing codes of conduct, disciplinary practices, and approaches to building positive school climate. For example, many schools in Maryland are using PBIS and restorative practices to help teachers better manage classrooms and provide alternatives to suspensions, resulting in dramatic drops in reported behavior incidents and suspensions.[50] Similar results have been found in Chicago and Cleveland through the use of social and emotional learning (SEL).[51] Yet another example involves youth in Michigan using their school-based Teen Advisory Council to change school climate, concentrating on peer mediation to support students in learning how to "disagree without being disagreeable."[52] Still another example involves some districts that are starting to embed lessons on implicit bias, equity, and justice into professional development, to aid teachers in understanding how they can best meet the needs of diverse students within the context of promoting achievement for all students.[53] Where you go from here depends on your findings, but your action plan can incorporate existing efforts in which your district already is engaged, such as Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind, PBIS, character education, SEL, school climate, educational equity, restorative practices, and others as long as the complementary initiative is being well implemented and realizing results.

PURPOSE OF STAGE 3 TASKS

Addressing disparities involves changing policies and procedures as well as adult attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Your action plan is likely to emphasize an entire suite of strategies such as providing training and supports for all school staff, eliminating problematic practices, and creating and applying fair and equitable policies for all students, as well as employing positive behavioral approaches, SEL and support, restorative practices, and mental health support.

The key to your action plan is identifying interventions that address the drivers and root causes of disparities in your school or district, as well as selecting evidenced-based approaches, programs, or practices that your school or district has the capacity to implement effectively. Effective implementation includes providing adults with the

Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline
An Educator's Action Planning Guide

supports they need to master new approaches and practices and providing students with the supports they need to succeed academically and manage their behavior.

Developing a clear and sustainable plan of action can honor the effort everyone has put into this process, incorporating everyone's voice, experiences, and ideas. It also helps to build trust prior to tackling the change process and keeps the lines of communication open to discuss what's working and what needs to be adjusted.

OVERVIEW OF STAGE 3 TASKS

The focus of Stage 3 is developing an actionable set of changes to begin reducing and eventually eliminating the root cause of disparities. In this stage, you will do the following:

3.1   Share your findings with the community in a manner that enhances the community's readiness to address disparities.

3.2   Develop a sustainable action plan that addresses the root causes of disparities.

3.3   Implement your action plan.

Stage 3 Plan Development Ideas and Resources

Although the focus of this guide is on conducting a root cause analysis, we know there are many important aspects of creating, implementing, evaluating, and monitoring an action plan that you may need to consider as you move forward in your work. We are not able to cover all these content areas within the scope of the guide, but in this section, we will provide links to additional resources for you to explore should you want to know more.

Resources and topics will touch on the following:

• Results and accountability frameworks to help you select and implement action strategies;

• How to identify and select evidence-based practices and interventions;

• Implementation planning and analysis;

• Evaluation and monitoring practices; and

• Communications resources to bolster public engagement.

Look for special resource sidebars as you work your way through Stage 3 tasks.

STAGE 3 TASKS

3.1 Share Your Findings With the Community

Before finalizing an action plan, your team should engage the community in a conversation about the results of your root cause findings and analyses. Ideally, you've engaged students, families, and other community stakeholders as part of your team from the beginning. Including these community members, as well as others who have a stake in building positive school climate (e.g., school staff, mental health professionals, and child welfare, court, law enforcement and juvenile justice representatives), means that many

important voices already have been heard throughout the process. Now it's time to engage others who have not been included and speak to a wider audience. This means talking "with" (not "to" or "at") the internal audience of the entire school or district, as well as with external audiences, including a broader range of parents and the larger community.

Disseminating disaggregated data without explanation or context would be inadequate, and possibly harmful, so some preparation is needed before sharing your findings. The readiness resources we provided in Stage 1 can be useful here. Even though you may have ongoing relationships with staff and community members and may be routinely engaged in conversation with them, you need to describe the specifics of the team's process of examining discipline data as well as how you reached your conclusions. A significant part of the process in Stage 3 is to gather feedback to help you shape the action plan so it reflects reality and the proposed implementation strategies are meaningful.

> This will be one of the most important places for meaningful conversation in your process. You will be talking to a wider circle of people—whether within your school, district, or community—and you want them to clearly understand the work you're presenting. You want to take the time for people to give you their thoughts and ideas, while communicating clearly what you're going to do with those thoughts and ideas. People will want to know when they can expect to see your final results and how they can continue to have input as plans roll out.

Communicate the following basics:

- A short summary of the process;
- Critical issues explored by the team;
- Data issues such reliability and validity and how any challenges were addressed;
- Key findings (as transparently as possible while respecting privacy rights);
- Strategies being considered; and
- What happens next, including when a draft plan will be made available for review and how people can provide input.

The materials or results you share and disseminate need not be lengthy. In fact, shorter and more concise is better.

Use Resources 6 and 7

Remember to fill in your chosen action strategies in your Action Plan Template and Root Cause Diagnostic Tree.

Find out more

Chapter 3 of *Using Data to Improve Schools: What's Working, an American Association of School Administrators Guide*, examines data, public engagement, and communications (http://aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Policy_and_Advocacy/files/UsingDataToImproveSchools.pdf).

Data dissemination experts recommend the following strategies for sharing your data:[54]

3.1.1. Present Data Strategically

Determine your purposes for sharing the data:

- What do you want different audiences to know and be able to do as a result of being exposed to the information? For example, the purpose of sharing data with school staff could be to elicit their commitment to implementing strategies to address disparities. When sharing data with families, the purpose could be to inform them about your efforts and enlist their support in continued assessment of progress.

- Be sure to have effective and engaging communicators share your information, with your data analysts standing by to answer questions.

3.1.2. Determine Which Data Should Be Presented

Based on the description of your purposes and audiences, determine how data can be reported. Provide essential information to ensure an open, transparent process that will help solve problems and enable the audience to understand the key issues and to engage meaningfully with the content while protecting the privacy of students.

Refer back to the section Ensure Data Privacy and Quality on page 30, including the listed resources, to help guide you.

3.1.3. Determine How and When to Present the Data

- Consider carefully how the data you have gathered can be transformed into useful information for each audience.

- Choose the best format for presenting the data, given your audience and purpose. Does the audience respond best to written documents or to presentations at meetings? You may need to present information in a variety of ways. For example, you can hand out a simple one- or two-page take-home fact sheet at a meeting with families at which you also provide a Q&A session on your results and plans. School board members may want to see more in-depth reports.

- What will work best to communicate the essential messages for each audience? Review some of the information previously summarized in the textbox on page 20 about cultural and linguistic competence to help you. Consider tables, graphs, narrative text, illustrative stories, examples, and quotes. Remember to do the following:
  - Provide data in a form that audiences can use.
  - Determine which data are most relevant for each audience.
  - Keep the level of detail manageable and relevant for each audience.
  - Report information on subgroups of interest to stakeholders, especially disaggregated data.

- Provide resources to assist understanding and interpretation of the data, such as graphical representations to show data, websites, or issue briefs.

  - Share overall results as well as disaggregated data.

- Consider how you can mobilize stakeholders using effective social marketing techniques that employ successful strategies developed in the business world to realize social goals (e.g., smoking cessation). Acknowledge that various members of the school community are at different levels of understanding and motivation regarding addressing disparities and exclusionary discipline. Tools for addressing guidance for social marketing are available on the website of the National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline (http://www.supportiveschooldiscipline.org/).

Remember to use the graphs generated through the Disciplinary Disparities Risk Assessment Tool for both education and conversation starters.

3.1.4. Anticipate Data-Related Questions and Challenges

- Describe the scope of your data collection.

- When appropriate, share data with students, staff, and administrators in advance of broader dissemination to get input on the "face validity" of the data and to anticipate challenges that may be encountered.

- If sensitive or challenging issues are involved, prepare the audience by honestly describing some of the issues early on, as well as how the school or district will address them. Focus on solutions, not challenges. Neither lay blame nor be defensive.

3.1.5. Think Long-Term

- Discuss how to improve data collection to address data challenges, as well as plans for continued data gathering and analysis over time. This exemplifies transparency in the use of data for measuring progress and continuous quality improvement.

- Refer back to the Discipline Data Checklist (Resource 2) you completed in Stage 1 as well as the Data Mining Decision Tree Tip Sheet (Resource 3) to see if any gaps remain.

- Develop and use a reporting format that can be maintained and will allow comparison of results over time.

3.1.6. Support the Use of Data for Quality Improvement

Describe how the data can be used for identifying evidence-based strategies or interventions; adding contextual adaptations of evidence-based programs; and planning the implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of your work.

More Stage 3 Resources

A variety of materials can help you understand how to select, implement, and evaluate evidence-based strategies. You may wish to dive deeply into some of these materials or select what you need in a more targeted way. We provide the following links so that you can select the materials most relevant for your work.

The National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline (NCSSD) has a webpage (http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/planning-implementing-and-evaluating-evidence-based-interventions) devoted to planning, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based interventions. It includes links to the following:

- Getting to Outcomes—A 10-step approach for strategic, results-based accountability. The framework helps you assess your capacities; determine the fit of strategies; and, after developing a plan, evaluate, continuously improve, and sustain your efforts.

Additional guidance on selecting effective interventions within the NCSSD website as well as through the federal youth.gov (http://youth.gov/) website.

A series of three issue briefs to help deepen knowledge on readiness, progress monitoring, and adapting to different contexts.

The Active Implementation Hub provides materials and short online lessons about implementing evidence-based practices (http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/modules-and-lessons). Among the many resources offered, you may find the following especially relevant to your Stage 3 work:

- The Hexagon Tool—Use to select evidence-based practices.
- Practice Profile Planning Tool—Aids in the identification of essential functions of evidence-based programs.
- District Capacity Assessment—An assessment used to align resources with intended outcomes.
- District Initiative Inventory—Walks you through a review of past and current programs to identify successes and challenges, including resource commitments.
- Implementation Drivers and Planning Series—These reports and tools for educators support the action planning process through understanding needed capacities and infrastructure for program success. Tools help you assess and track your efforts as well as improve your work as you move ahead.

3.2. Develop an Action Plan

Your team will engage in two levels of planning:

Short- and intermediate-term strategies aim to change the drivers and mechanisms identified in your root cause analysis. These strategies also may address changing disciplinary practices and enhancing teachers' classroom management skills. Examples could involve implementing restorative practices in high schools or revising the code of conduct to exclude willful defiance as a reason for suspension or expulsion.[55]

Longer term strategies aim to improve disciplinary practices, including improving data collection and further improving school climate and engagement. Specific strategies could

include taking additional steps to improve student attendance, connectedness, and social and emotional competence. You want to develop a menu of interventions for your action plan that demonstrate logical links connecting your data to the root causes you identified and then select the effective strategies that can be implemented effectively in your school or district.

Your team may feel overwhelmed by data and findings. It's important to prioritize your actions, starting by identifying those low-hanging fruit that can produce quick wins that strategically move the work forward. Remember that some of these root causes will take time to reduce and finally eliminate. You could break down some of your strategies into smaller, more manageable pieces and build short-term goals, benchmarks, and outcomes into your action plans so your team, school, district, and community can quickly experience success. Steady, demonstrable progress on your overall plan is a laudable aim.

Organize by proven principles

Consider grounding your strategies in the following principles outlined in *How Educators Can Eradicate Disparities in School Discipline: A Briefing Paper* on School-Based Interventions.[56]

Principles of Conflict Prevention

Research suggests that to prevent unnecessary discipline and to prevent the overrepresentation of particular groups of children and adolescents in school discipline, educators can equitably offer all students the following:

- Supportive relationships—Forge authentic connections with all students.
- Academic rigor—Promote the potential of all students, hold high expectations, and provide high-level learning opportunities.
- Culturally relevant and responsive teaching—Teaching that responds respectfully to students' real lives.
- Bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments—Create inclusive, positive classroom and school environments in which students feel fairly treated.

Principles of Conflict Intervention

Research suggests that when discipline problems arise, educators can engage in the following equity-driven behaviors:

- Inquiry into the causes of conflicts.
- Problem-solving approaches to discipline.
- Recognition of student and family voice and their perspectives on conflicts' causes and solutions.
- Re-integration of students after conflict.

Find out more

Decisions in Motion: IS[3] Toolkit 2 Addressing Discipline provides useful information on developing a plan to address discipline. Download it at http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov//sites/default/files/IS3%2BToolkit%2B2.pdf.

Meet the common challenges of planning to address root causes

The process of identifying root causes and developing effective best-practice interventions is challenging and can be derailed or misdirected by too narrow a focus on problem behaviors and biased ways of understanding data. As you develop your response to disparities in school discipline, be sure that the plan focuses on addressing the disparities students are facing. Consider the following as you develop your plans.

Move beyond simply reducing numbers
Schools and districts should focus not only on eliminating discipline disparities but also on reducing the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices by adopting positive approaches to school discipline. If the data show that your school or district is disciplining too many students from a particular subgroup, the solution is not simply to reduce the number of students from the subgroup who are disciplined. Although this approach is important, it's also important to enhance the overall school climate and student learning. Doing so goes beyond just keeping more students in school; students also need to have meaningful opportunities for learning and be actively engaged in learning.

Overcome a narrow view of data and root causes
You're trying to do a number of things in your work—address school climate, prevent disciplinary problems from occurring, look for and address problems early on before they spiral into more serious problems, and provide the supports needed to prevent problems. This approach will likely require multitiered strategies—universal, early intervention, and intensive interventions—that improve academic instruction and conditions for learning for all students and that employ and align social and emotional learning, positive behavioral interventions and supports, restorative practices, and development of capacity in relevant areas.

Confront bias
Being aware of possible implicit bias and attribution bias in decision making is critical for ensuring that your action plan is effective. These challenges can be openly addressed by the team and by analyzing school-based root causes. Periodically examining your problem-solving and decision-making processes for bias and keeping these processes open and transparent should help to eliminate both attribution and implicit bias.

Ensure continued support
Improving your school or district's disciplinary code and its implementation may require changes in staff responsibilities and levels of authority in the decision-making process. The active and ongoing support of school and district leaders remains critical.

Use best practices
Your action plan should draw on best practices that your school or district has the capacity to implement and sustain. It's also critical that the best practices you select be properly aligned to address the drivers and mechanisms that are the root causes of the disparities in your school or district. Many best practices explicitly define the types of students they have been demonstrated to positively affect. Not using a best practice or using it for the wrong students can be ineffective or even harmful.

Find out more

For more information on implementing best practices, go to https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/program-implementation.

3.3 Implement the Action Plan

Your action plan should be the result of consensus among key stakeholders. The team should be able to demonstrate the following:

- Sound problem solving was used in developing the plan.
- Decisions were evaluated to avoid bias.
- Mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the plan will be implemented equitably.

For example, if the action plan features implementing alternatives to suspension such as behavioral counseling, restorative justice, or student-teacher facilitated problem solving, ensuring that these techniques are applied without bias is critical and may require careful training and data-gathering from the individuals making disciplinary decisions.

Two types of training are generally needed to effectively implement a plan. First is the awareness training that should be provided to all staff and made available to other stakeholders to enable everyone to understand the changes and initiatives that will be implemented to improve school climate and address disparities in school discipline. This training should include or be informed by an understanding of child and youth development, as well as cultural and linguistic competence.[57]

More intense training and support is required for those who will implement the changes and initiatives. This support includes, for example, enhancing teachers' skills related to addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom, preparing school counselors to provide behavioral counseling and other supports, guiding staff responsible for recording disciplinary data in new strategies, providing school resource officers with a menu of standardized and graduated sanctions to use, and providing training and support to staff who are implementing restorative practices. Administrators in charge of discipline may require training to fully understand the root causes identified, as well as appropriate alternatives to suspension. Changes in disciplinary policies and practices should be part of all relevant trainings to ensure that "old practices" do not reemerge among some staff.

Find out more

In addition to the implementation and evaluation resources we've highlighted in the Stage 3 Resources sidebars, you may want to look at Step 5 (http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov//sites/default/files/IS3%2BToolkit%2B2.pdf) of the Decisions in Motion: IS[3] Toolkit 2 Addressing Discipline, which outlines how to develop a monitoring plan.

A Training Plan Template at the aiHub also can help you develop training programs: http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resources/training-plan-template.

What happens now?

We know that a lot of thought, activity, and resources go into implementing any action plan. We do not have the capacity within the space of this guide to tell you everything you need to know about monitoring your plan as it rolls out, evaluating your work, and continuously improving what you're doing going forward. We know some of you are using these processes already in the course of the work you are already doing. We also would direct your attention back to some of the resources we have noted elsewhere in the guide to help you.

Find out more

Step 6 of the Iowa Toolkit (http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov//sites/default/files/IS3%2BToolkit%2B2.pdf) focuses on "knowing if we've made a difference." Also, return to the Implementation page of the NCSSLE website for more resources at http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/program-implementation.

Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline
An Educator's Action Planning Guide