

Evaluation of the Districtwide Safety Initiative: 2004-05

REIS05-179-4

At a Glance

The Dallas Independent School District's Districtwide Safety Initiative is a multifaceted effort to improve safety and civility. The initiative consists of more than 20 component programs and involves multiple district departments. The programs and interventions in the safety initiative consist of universal programs, enforcement programs, select interventions, and targeted interventions.

Programs and Budget

Universal programs consisted of prevention and intervention strategies aimed at all students. Enforcement programs strived to reduce crime on campus. Select interventions focused on students who did not respond adequately to the universal strategies. Targeted interventions focused on students who did not respond adequately to the universal and/or select strategies.

The 2004-2005 evaluation of the Safety Initiative concentrated on the universal programs and the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP), a targeted intervention. The universal programs consisted of the Safe and Civil Schools programs, character education, and drug and violence education. Safe and Civil Schools is a series of programs designed to improve school safety, enhance classroom management, reduce student tardiness, and foster a better school climate. The programs in the series consist of Foundations, CHAMPs, and START on Time.

Foundations offered a comprehensive, data-driven approach to school safety and civility. Campus-based teams collect and analyze data to identify priorities, implement improvement plans, and monitor and revise plans as needed. Sixteen secondary schools (13 high schools and 3 middle schools) participated in Foundations in 2004-2005.

CHAMPs stands for Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, and Participation, which were the

program's key aspects. CHAMPs was a classroom management program that provided teachers with tools to teach responsibility and structure classes to promote responsible behavior.

Safe Transitions and Reduced Tardies (START on Time) sought to reduce student tardiness. The program designated staff members to "sweep" campuses for tardy students and to deal with them quickly and consistently.

The Character Education component used the Character Counts! program. Elementary and middle school counselors presented guidance lessons that emphasize the program's six pillars of good character: trustworthiness, respect, caring, citizenship, fairness, and responsibility.

The Drug and Violence Education program called for the Safe and Drug Free Schools department to provide orientation for elementary and middle school physical education teachers on the state's drug and violence prevention curriculum. The teachers then presented weekly lessons on drug and violence prevention.

The district operated three secondary DAEPs at the Village Fair alternative center: a high school, a middle school, and Redirections, a school for students with substance abuse violations. The district also operated two elementary DAEPs.

The 2004-2005 budget for the safety initiative totaled \$557,920. Nearly half of that total went to the district's Department of Police and Security Services.

Program Implementation

Implementation of Safe and Civil Schools began in September 2004. Teachers and administrators from the 16 schools in Foundations attended a series of two-day training sessions. The schools surveyed students, staff members, and parents about safety, school climate, and student behavior issues. They also observed common areas, such as corridors, and examined data on disciplinary referrals. Most of the schools identified tardiness,

and behavior in hallways and cafeterias as improvement priorities. The schools had the option to implement improvement plans in the 2005 spring semester or to spend the 2004-2005 year in planning and implement improvement efforts in 2005-2006. Nine of the 16 schools opted to begin implementing improvement plans in the 2005 spring semester, and seven chose to wait until 2005-2006. Most Foundations team members rated the training sessions positively and agreed that the program was a useful source of ideas for improving campus safety and civility.

Fifteen of the 16 campuses implemented START on Time. Surveys found that most team members thought students and teachers understood the procedures for handling tardiness. However, one-third of team members did not believe hallways had adequate supervision. More than 80% of team members agreed that pass periods were more orderly and that the program helped reduce tardiness.

Overall, 523 teachers and 51 administrative staff members attended CHAMPs training in 2004-2005. An April 2005 survey found that most teachers thought the program provided new ideas for classroom management.

For the Character Education program, all elementary and middle schools developed implementation plans. All included character education lessons, and many campuses included other activities, such as a character-themed word of the week, character-related quotations and announcements, and recognition of students who exhibit strong character. An on-line survey administered by the Department of Counseling Services found that about 87% of elementary homerooms received character education lessons in the 2004 fall semester, and 57% of middle school social studies classrooms received such lessons. Data for the 2005 spring semester were not available for inclusion in this report.

For the Drug and Violence Education component, specialists from the Safe and Drug Free Schools department provided orientation on the state's Drug and Violence Education (DAVE) curriculum. The amount of orientation varied widely because of teachers' schedule conflicts, and some received more than others. About 98% of the teachers indicated in a spring 2005 survey that they had given drug and violence prevention lessons. However, more than one-third of the teachers

expressed doubts about whether they had sufficient training to implement the lessons.

During 2004-2005, a total of 2,581 DISD students attended at least one day at an off-campus disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP). The middle school DAEP, housed in the Village Fair alternative center, had the highest cumulative enrollment. Nearly 75% of the students referred to the DAEPs were male. DAEP teachers, in general, had less experience (as measured by years in the district) than their counterparts in other district schools.

Early Outcomes

Because 2004-2005 was the first year of implementation for many of the safety initiative's programs, only limited outcomes data were available. Disciplinary referral data and the Serious Free Behavior Index (SFBI) scores from the Department of Planning and Project Support provided outcomes data for the Foundations schools.

Overall, the Foundations schools showed large increases in disciplinary referrals over the previous school year, but minor offenses accounted for much of the increase. More vigorous and consistent enforcement of school standards and rules, as promoted by the Safe and Civil Schools program, may account for much of the increased referrals. Mandatory removals, which required placement of offending students in DAEPs, declined among the Foundations schools, and expellable offenses increased only slightly.

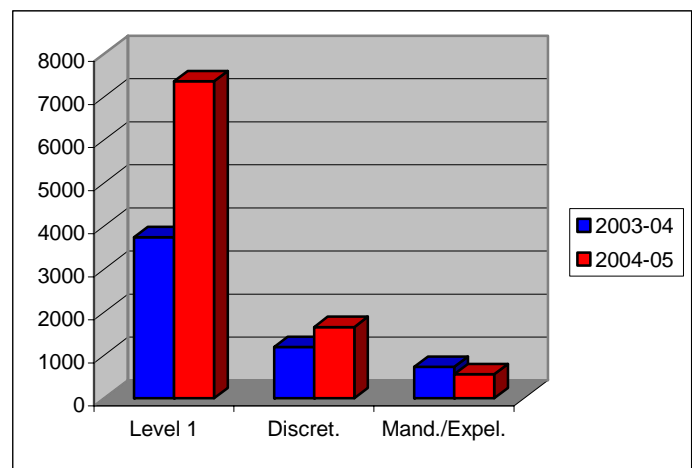


Figure 1: Disciplinary referrals for Foundations campuses, 2003-2005