Safety Initiative: 2007-2008

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At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent’s Safety Initiative is a districtwide effort adopted in 2004-2005. It is designed to promote a safe and civil environment at secondary school campuses based on the original premise of the initiative that instruction cannot occur if incidents are present that take away from the district’s primary mission of preparing students for graduation. It was launched as a five-year multifaceted effort of 20 programs working together to meet one of the district’s goals: to maintain a safe, secure, and orderly environment. Its objectives include improving safety and security, deterring crime and misbehavior, and providing an environment conducive to learning. The focus of this evaluation is the Safe and Civil Schools Series and its implementation. The Gang Intervention Program was added as requested by program management.

Programs and Budget

The district implements the Safe and Civil Schools Series as the prevention and intervention strategies it is using to protect its students. Procedures are categorized into three levels: school-wide, classroom, and individual. The three components of the series are designed to improve schoolwide safety (Foundations), reduce student tardiness (START on Time), and enhance classroom management (CHAMPS).

Foundations is a school-wide level comprehensive program that guides schools through the process of designing a positive and proactive schoolwide discipline plan. Its development and implementation utilizes a continuous improvement cycle approach of data driven decision-making. Under the campus administrator’s leadership, implementation is facilitated by a team that includes an assigned coach (from Safe & Drug Free, Psychological and Social Services, and Safe and Civil Schools departments). Team responsibilities include: attend training, assist in the development of processes and implementation, train campus staff on training received, and lead the continuous improvement process.

START on Time! Safe Hallway Transitions and Reducing Tardiness is a secondary schoolwide level program designed to create safe hallway transitions and reduce tardiness schoolwide as well as disruption in the classroom when arriving late. Its implementation is a collaborative effort by all campus staff to decrease tardiness in order to maximize instructional time and promote safety and civility.

CHAMPS (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, and Participation) is a classroom level program that guides teachers through the process of identifying and maintaining the effectiveness of their management plan, and strengthening or adding to it to promote responsible student behavior. Students are taught the expected and acceptable behaviors during instruction.

District leadership has maintained the annual funding close to the level it committed to provide at the onset of the initiative. The Safe and Civil Schools Department coordinates training and implementation for the program. The program budget for 2007-2008 was $225,471. Additionally, the budget included funding of $181,357 from Title II, Part A for its training component.

Program Implementation

The support and participation of the campus administrator is critical to program fidelity, and the campus team’s ability to implement the plan even when there is an administrative change. Secondary schools are divided into four cohorts for implementation purposes. In 2007-2008, 11 schools moved to Cohort 4 from their previous cohort. These included: Spruce, Roosevelt, Samuell, Pinkston, and North Dallas. Hill, Holmes, Spence, and Skyline were formerly Cohort 2; Smith, and Long were Cohort 3. Staff reviewed data that included but were not limited to: training participation, observed levels of implementation (during campus visits or at trainings), and campus leadership changes. Washington and two new schools, Garcia and Lang, were included in Cohort 4. At the request of their principal, three elementary schools (Burnet, Stevens Park, Cochran) expressed a desire to participate and received training and staff assistance.

Prior to this year, teacher training was coordinated by the district’s Professional Development Department. In 2007-2008, however, the Safe and Civil Schools Department coordinated the training for all three-program components. A consultant from Teaching Strategies, Inc. conducted the trainings for district staff and follow-up visits at 15 schools to observe the level of program implementation, provide support and/or feedback. Based on the original plan, Cohort 1 completed their third year of implementation and was not required to attend training. Needs assessment results revealed that in addition to the team training, campus administrators wanted Foundations, START and CHAMPS presentations/ overviews at their campuses for all or selected staff. The 2007-2008 focus for CHAMPS was to pilot campus based
coaching that provides an on-site knowledge and skill base support for implementation of instructional classroom discipline management strategies.

Schools are required to develop and implement a campus specific discipline plan as part of their Campus Improvement Plan.

Campuses are also to develop a Start on Time Plan for reducing tardies. Twenty (20) schools submitted a plan with their campus procedures.

Tardy data (Figure 1) revealed that 823,359 tardies were reported for 2007-2008 an increase of 21,019 from 2006-2007. The majority of tardies occur during first period (242,912). The next highest were in the fourth (104,213) and fifth (120,123) periods.

Typically, reasons for tardies in the first period include not getting to school on time due to oversleeping or transportation issues. School entry security procedures (e.g., backpack inspection, metal detectors) may contribute to not getting to class on time as may lack of implementation or non-existent campus procedures for getting students into classes. Fourth and fifth period tardies may be attributable to students not getting back to class from lunch on time.

Chapter 37, Safe Schools Act, Texas Education Code requires that the district define and communicate student behavioral expectations to students and parents and the various kinds of misconduct that may or, in some cases, result in disciplinary consequences. The district’s Student Code of Conduct identifies four categories of infractions with the required actions: First level: reporting to principal not required; Discretionary: reporting to principal may be required; Mandatory: reporting to principal required; and Expellable: expulsion mandatory.

The Student Discipline Office compiles an annual report on the four categories of offenses occurring at all Dallas ISD schools. Reported offenses for 2007-2008 totaled 64,130. Table 1 provides the number of offenses by category. First level offenses, which are the less serious violations, accounted for about three-fourths (77%) of the campus reported disciplinary referrals. First level offenses include student misbehaviors such as dress and grooming code violations, use of offensive language, safety rule violations, and single acts of disruptive behavior, including non-compliance and insubordination. Categories of the more serious offenses (Discretionary, Mandatory, Expellable), and Teacher Removal accounted for the remaining 23 percent.

The Dallas ISD Gang Prevention and Intervention Program utilizes evidence-based strategies, a three-prong approach to prevention, intervention, and enforcement. In addition to two funded positions, two gang intervention professional consulting firms are included in the program with a funding level of $300,000. Gang consultants and district program staff provided direct student services and conducted gang awareness/prevention training for school personnel, parents, and students. It is difficult to measure the effectiveness or outcomes of this program because the measure is what “did not happen” as a result of the prevention and intervention services to reduce gang influences in campuses and necessitate enforcement.

Summary

The Safe and Civil Schools Series is the mechanism the district selected to comply with requirements that it provide violence prevention and intervention policies and procedures for protecting its students. Data reviewed included training attendance, school visits, required plans submission, tardiness, and offenses. Results support the following conclusion: Four years after the program begin the level of implementation at campuses ranges from nonexistent to low, to some working level of implementation of the process.

The number of district staff that has received training within the past four years of the implementation implies that enough district personnel have the knowledge base to implement the strategies that will produce results in reducing the number of offenses and tardies. However, principals need confirmation and assurance that program implementation (a) addresses the district policy of student welfare and safety, and (b) has a direct link to instruction. Campus program implementation of the strategies should not be an option. The program needs visible participation and articulated support from all high-level administrators regarding the desired outcomes of improving student achievement, discipline management, and the well-being of its students. If schools are to be able to create safe and civil environments conducive to learning that result in improved student achievement, the Safe and Civil
Schools Series implementation priority should be elevated and communicated.

For more information, see EA08-179-2, available at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/, or contact Lydia Hernández at 972-925-6445.