Safety Initiative: 2008-09

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At-a-Glance

The Safety Initiative was a districtwide effort adopted by the Dallas Independent School District in 2004-2005. The district’s vision was to create safe, civil, and productive learning environments at its secondary schools where (a) Safe: time and energy are not wasted in everyone trying to protect themselves; (b) Civil: everyone is respectful to everyone; and (c) Productive: students are motivated and engaged in learning.

The focus of the initiative was to improve student achievement by providing assistance and support for schoolwide discipline and positive behavior by multiple district functions working together to maintain a safe, secure, and orderly environment. The district adopted the Safe & Civil Schools Series and its procedures for decreasing disorderly conduct incidents and classroom disruptions so that they do not take away from its primary mission of preparing students for graduation.

Programs and Budget

The district implemented three components of the Safe and Civil Schools Series: Foundations, START on Time!, and CHAMPs. The components are a set of materials designed to guide schools in designing processes for improvement of safety and civility across school settings. Foundations and START on Time! are schoolwide programs and CHAMPs is a classroom component. Areas of concentration are both on and off the campus and include common areas such as cafeterias, hallways, courtyards/patios, and buses/bus loading areas.

Foundations focuses on positive behavior support and schoolwide discipline improvement.

START on Time! (Safe Hallway Transitions and Reducing Tardiness) is designed to create safe transition procedures, and reduce tardiness and classroom disruptions by late arrivals.

CHAMPs (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, and Participation) guides teachers on promoting responsible and student behaviors during instruction.

The components share a set of beliefs that include:
- All students must be treated with dignity and respect.
- Students should be taught the skills and behaviors necessary for success.
- Motivation and responsibility should be encouraged through positive interactions and building relationship with students.

Student misbehavior represents a teaching opportunity.

The program was funded by Title II, Part A Improving Teacher Quality State Grants. One locally funded program coordinator oversees implementation. Table 1 displays the 2008-2009 budget. The largest amount was spent for implementation of the schoolwide components, including contracted services. Close to 75% was used to pay for Safe and Civil Schools consultants who provided training, school leadership consulting services, and campus support. The largest amount (70%) of the classroom component was used to purchase CHAMPs materials.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object Code</th>
<th>Budget Category</th>
<th>Classroom Component Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Schoolwide Components Total</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>6100</td>
<td>Extra Duty</td>
<td>$10,535</td>
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<td>$151,659</td>
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<td>6200</td>
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<td>Supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>6400</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>$102,238</td>
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Program Implementation

The district implemented the following Safe and Civil Schools structure for schoolwide discipline:
- A cohort system is used
- A Safe and Civil Schools trainer works with leadership teams from multiple schools across two years with a third year of follow-up support
- Site-based leadership teams guide campus efforts with active support from the principal
- All school staff is involved
- Data-driven decision-making drives an ongoing improvement cycle

School Characteristics

Implementation targeted 56 comprehensive secondary campuses, referred to as “Foundations schools”, divided into five cohorts. Cohorts 3, 4 and 5 participated in the 2008-2009 training phase. Cohort 3 completed its training phase at the end of the school year. Cohorts 1 and 2 previously completed their training but are expected to continue their projects for maintaining safe, secure, and orderly environments.

Process Activities

Activities designed to help campuses successfully implement the Safe and Civil Schools Series process included but were not limited to the following:
Professional Development
A total of 469 campus team members attended the trainings. Consultants from Teaching Strategies, Inc. conducted the trainings, which included opportunities for teams to work on and/or complete local campus projects. The program coordinator conducted follow-up and on-site trainings. Additionally, a team of classroom teachers worked with the coordinator to support and conduct the classroom management training. On-site violence intervention and prevention trainings for students and parents were facilitated or provided by the coordinator.

Safety Surveys
A total of 17 schools administered safety surveys designed to measure perceptions of students and staff on safety issues, student-to-student interactions, student attitudes about school, school rules and expectations and school problems. The staff survey included the three additional categories of school rules and standards, staff interactions and school policies, and school-family relationships. Survey results reveal that students feel safe in the school with the exception of two common areas: the restrooms and the parking lot. These are two areas that tend to have less direct staff supervision. Similar proportions of students and staff agreed about the level of respect between students. They indicated that lower levels of respect exist in the cafeteria, hallways, and courtyard. Staff rated themselves much higher than students on the level of respect and support of students but indicated a lower level of respect for staff by students. Students were more positive in their attitudes toward school. Approximately 53% of staff, in comparison to 82% of students, believes the work they do at school is important. Likewise, 71% of students indicated that they are proud to be part of the school, as compared to 62% of staff. About half of staff respondents disagreed that their school has a consistent approach to behavior management, and about half agreed they receive sufficient support when dealing with difficult students. All respondents indicated that they know how and when to respond to student misbehavior. Staff believes that racial conflicts, sexual harassment, and racial harassment are problems.

Campus Discipline Plan
Schools are required to develop a campus discipline plan as a component of their Campus Improvement Plan. A review of 10 secondary plans found that all addressed discipline management with specific strategies, and/or procedures and the Safe and Civil Schools process (Section 6) and the Safe, Secure, and Orderly Environment target (Section 3).

Disciplinary Offenses
As required by Chapter 37, Safe Schools Act and Texas Education Code, the district’s Student Code of Conduct defined and communicated student behavioral expectations to students and parents for the various kinds of misconduct that may result in disciplinary consequences. The district categorized infractions into four levels: First Level, Discretionary, Mandatory, and Expellable. The district’s Student Discipline Office reported a total of 63,294 offenses for 2008-2009, a decrease of 836 from 2007-2008 (64,130). As shown in Figure 1, decreases were reported for First Level, or less serious, offenses (4146), and Expellable (13), the most serious offenses. Increases were reported for Discretionary (3129) and Mandatory (185).

Figure 1. Number of 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 disciplinary offenses by category.

Additional Activities
The consultant, coordinator, and Foundations coaches conducted 17 campus visits. The expected outcomes include successful structuring of school settings, student behavior that indicates that responsible behavior expectations were taught, active and positive supervision of student behavior, and immediate and consistent corrections by staff. Results of the campus visits indicate that the Safe and Civil Schools processes were not being implemented at all Foundations schools. Campuses received feedback on observations, and recommendations were made for enhancing or improving the effectiveness of campus

Thirty-eight coaches whose main responsibility is to promote schoolwide acceptance and implementation of the components were provided at 44 campuses.

Schools were given the option to complete a self-assessment implementation rubric to rate their perceptions of the current phase of implementation. Thirteen schools submitted 59 completed rubrics.

Recommendations
The focus to increase academic achievement is lost when campus staff must devote time to deal with discipline and tardiness. Based on review of the results of the process activities, there is a need for increased participation in the training and renewed prioritization by district leadership for implementation at the campus level.

For more information, see EA09-179-2, available at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/.