

# Does Your District Office Support Alternative Discipline?

*Our district will support ALL students with...*

*Our district exists to provide ALL students a...*

*...Where the student comes FIRST*

You can probably finish the rest of these district mission or vision statements, but can you finish them, confidently including the importance of the social-emotional needs of ALL students? To advocate for ALL students when using discipline in an alternative fashion, these commonly used mission or vision statements need to include, "...the social-emotional learning of a student is valued as importantly as any academic subject taught in school." Most mission and vision statements say we support ALL students, but do our actions reflect it when it comes to student behavior? Can we support equity for all students and focus on the social-emotional development of a student while using punitive, exclusionary practices as the only means of teaching behavior?

There is a disproportionality in discipline for students of color when compared to their white counterparts for similar behavior incidents in schools. For there to be equity in district discipline, a belief system is needed that allows educators to advocate for individualized responses to student behavior rather than a one size fits all approach. Here are the key differences we have found between *Supportive* and *Unsupportive* District Office responses when it comes to implementing alternative discipline in lieu of suspensions in schools:

Supportive	Unsupportive
Clear and consistent district wide initiatives	Too many initiatives
Training and supports in place to build the capacity of the administrators and school staff on initiatives aligned with clear goals and outcomes	Inadequate training and supports; inconsistency of initiatives
Updated policies in regards to discipline with intentional language that allows for alternative discipline and restorative practices	Policies not updated to match the changes in laws
Working with school administration on discipline decisions that require collaboration between the school and district due to the sensitivity or the severity of the discipline	Reversing administrator decisions about alternative discipline due to external/political pressures
Educates the school board and community on the importance of addressing discipline similar to academics. Allows opportunities for the community and school board to address their concerns and needs in regards to such topics	Not able to articulate and defend the purpose of alternative discipline to the school board or community

If district mission or vision statements are going to continue to claim they address the needs of ALL students, it may be time for districts to revisit practices, responses, and systems that support such statements. **A mission or vision statement is just a statement, unless the actions of administration from the top down support and bring it to life.** Educators often speak about the importance of creating a positive school culture, yet we forget about the ripple effects an unsupportive district office culture has on schools.

We challenge district office staff to evaluate their current state and break the status quo by addressing uncomfortable topics, such as discipline inequities, as they move forward in supporting their schools. Use *The PBIS Tier One Handbook* and *Don't Suspend Me* as a guide to move your school or district forward in preventing these inequities, keeping students in school, and changing behavior.