

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 929

EA 026 956

AUTHOR Thorbahn, Keith R.
 TITLE Saturday School and ALEC: Alternative Discipline Programs.
 PUB DATE Jul 95
 NOTE 11p.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Academic Probation; Behavior Standards; *Discipline; *Discipline Policy; High Schools; *In School Suspension; Program Effectiveness; School Counseling; *Suspension

ABSTRACT

Student discipline problems in some high schools have been exacerbated by external societal problems. This paper presents outcomes of two discipline programs implemented in a small, rural high school. One program involved the creation of a Saturday school for students serving detention. The Alternative Learning Education Center (ALEC) was established to provide continuing education and counseling for repeat offenders. School discipline referrals for grades 9 through 12 during the first half of the year (the period prior to program implementation) were compared with those for the second half of the year (after the programs were implemented). After implementation of the two programs, the number of students who were suspended dropped from 62 to 17. The Saturday school provided a viable alternative to suspension. The programs appeared to change students' attitudes by giving them choices and helping them to understand the consequences of their behavior. Tougher consequences, more descriptive discipline codes, and counseling appeared to decrease student-referral problems in the school. Contains seven references. (LMI)

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Saturday School and ALEC: Alternative
Discipline Programs
Keith R. Thorbahn
Bowling Green State University

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Abstract

Student discipline in high schools has always been a concern to most people in this country. Corporal punishment, suspensions, and detentions, some commonly used ways of dealing with discipline problems have been found to be unacceptable or ineffective. Many discipline problems have remained the same or escalated because of the influx of societal problems entering the public schools. This creates a problem for most educators. One high school studied, implemented two programs to help positively deal with discipline cases. School discipline referrals, grades' nine through twelve were examined the first half of the school year before these programs were implemented, and the second half of the school year after the programs were implemented. Over the course of the school year, the effect of implementing these two programs was found to have been successful in lowering the number of discipline referrals and cause a change in student behavior.

Saturday School and ALEC: Alternative
Discipline Programs

The purpose of school is for students to be educated, most would agree. Most students think of high school as a social meeting place, where they interact with friends, teachers, and staff members of the school (Emmers, 1981). Public schools are still thought of as being effective, according to a recent Gallop Poll (Moore & Newport, 1993). Discipline problems or a lack of discipline in public schools is still quite a problem (Elam, Gallup, & Rose, 1992). In order for learning to take place in the public school setting, discipline problems that take students off-task are unwanted. Greater student time spent on-task learning generally results in fewer discipline problems in the classroom (Berliner & Fisher, 1985). This study was done to evaluate the effectiveness of two programs that try to correct discipline problems in a way that will alter students behavior towards a positive, acceptable form. These programs also keep students in school rather than allow them to be outside of school during the school day.

There are many reasons that discipline problems occur in the school setting. Developing strategies that allow students to think individually, be accountable for their actions, and conform to a given set of standards or criteria is many times a problem for some students. Students many times are having other problems not related to school, but school seems to bring these outside

problems into the classroom. Community and parent involvement and support is many times difficult to obtain. The reasons are numerous, but parent involvement does improve student views on education and its importance to students (Finders & Lewis, 1994).

One high school was studied and the effect of two programs had in limiting the number of discipline referrals and increasing student time at school was documented. This high school has about 650 students, from a rural background. A family of four's income is about \$26,000. The school system is made up of many small towns.

Saturday school is the first program. This program is offered as an alternative to suspensions and detentions. Detentions are normally served by students after school for one-half hour, for misbehavior at school. Attendance for detentions was low, and teachers and other school personnel were required to supervise the students during the detention and in school suspension. Saturday school could be given and would be served on a Saturday from 8:00 a.m. till 12:00 a.m. Students not serving detentions were usually given out of school suspensions.

ALEC is short for Alternative Learning Education Center. This program is designed for the student who has been a repeat offender of several student discipline codes and has been suspended from school. ALEC is designed to put the student in a comfortable setting where he or she can continue to perform school work, but also get some counseling that will allow them to work out some

problems that they currently are dealing with. Students are generally placed in ALEC for a minimum of five days. Parents are responsible for transportation to the center. This program is designed for the student who would normally be suspended out of school for three to five days more than two times.

Increased involvement from parents, tougher consequences, and counseling should bring about a change in student behavior and performance in school. Analyzing the data from this past school year will allow me to use the same students before the programs were implemented and after the programs were implemented. The main objective of the school's discipline code and policies is to create a learning atmosphere. The objective of these programs is to change student behavior from undesirable to acceptable.

Method

One high school was sampled and all students participated for the entire school year. There were 650 students, 330 males and 320 females, age 13-19. The discipline files were evaluated and the types of referrals and number of days missed due to the suspensions were recorded. The student school discipline code was also changed at the beginning of the school year before the study started. The student discipline codes' were increased from 12 to 28 discipline. Student referrals were made from teachers and staff. This included administration personnel. The school year was divided, using September 1994 through December 1995 as the first half, and January 1995 through May 1995, as the second half of the

year. The referrals were recorded by date, reason for referral, action taken, and days missed from school, either in school or out of school. These numbers were then compared with the total school population.

Results

The first half of the year there were 34 students who were suspended in school for 88 days, and 28 students were suspended out of school for 168 days. Of the 62 students who were suspended, 16 were repeat offenders. Of all 650 students, only 7% were suspended for one reason or another, each being suspended an average of 5 days either in school or out of school.

The second half of the school year there were 6 students who were suspended in school for 16 days, and 11 students who were suspended out of school for 39 days. 37 students were assigned to serve Saturday school instead of being suspended from school, and 2 students were assigned to the ALEC program. Three students were assigned to a 4 day counseling program at the local school.

Place Table 1 about here

The total number of students suspended during school the second half of the year dropped from 62 to 17 students. This is a dramatic decrease in the number of students being suspended. Only 2.6% of the student body were suspended during the second half of the school year. Saturday school was used to replace suspension. There were 37 students who served 65 mornings of Saturday school.

Discussion

Do alternative discipline programs like Saturday school and ALEC make a difference in keeping students in school, where they can have a chance to learn, or is this just another fad program designed to steer our attention from the real problems of our public school systems? In this situation, yes these programs are working to change some attitudes about behavior in school and also when these students are out of school. A positive high school experience does make a difference in each person's life and most people will look back on the experience's they had during high school and remember many things, good and bad. These experiences will shape the rest of their lives (Conley, Holter, Lemon, Safran, Thompson, & Wahl). Alternative discipline programs, or other student centered programs, do work if given the chance. When the students are given the proper counseling and allowed to be steered in the right direction with the help of other people, they can succeed. Giving the students the flexibility of choice, many times is the right avenue to choose (Cale, 1992). These programs allow students to choose their next type of behavior when placed in the school setting. With the proper counseling and encouragement, students will be able to adhere to the discipline codes in place, where they may have failed before. Going to school on Saturday is not a student's top priority, and many will not repeat the process once they have went through it.

Tougher consequences, more descriptive discipline codes, and counseling have really seemed to make a difference in this

particular school. The teachers and administrators are excited about the prospect of continuing these programs and continually decreasing the number of students who will be suspended from school, while increasing their time available to learn in the classroom.

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Table 1

Discipline Cases as Recorded by Time of Year and
Action Taken

<u># of Discipline Cases</u>						
	<u># Out</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u># In</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Saturday School</u>	<u>ALEC</u>
1st Half	28	168	34	88	NA	NA
2nd Half	11	39	6	16	37	2