Is your In-School Suspension program successful?

In-School Suspension (ISS) is a common feature of the discipline program in most secondary schools. Many ISS programs are set up solely as a location in which to house students with discipline referrals; however, the most effective ISS programs are designed to teach socially appropriate behaviors. The most important goal of any discipline program should be to change unwanted student behavior. ISS programs can accomplish this objective when the program is appropriately designed to be an effective part of the school's overall discipline plan.

Morris and Howard (2003) summarized three main models of ISS: punitive, academic and therapeutic. Each of these models views suspension through a different lens, and aims to address the problem that resulted in the suspension. The punitive model is based on the assumption that students act up in order to cause trouble and that punishment will stop this misbehavior from occurring in the future. The academic model presumes that behavior problems originate from students who have learning difficulties and are therefore frustrated in the classroom. The focus of suspension in this model is on the assessment and remediation of skill deficits or learning difficulties. Finally, the therapeutic model views discipline problems as resulting from a problem or issue that the student is experiencing, and the purpose of suspension is to help the student reflect on what has transpired and to provide support to assist the student in solving the problem.

ISS programs need not necessarily follow these models, but rather schools should decide on the purpose that their ISS program will serve and design a program with those goals in mind.

The following pages provide key features of an effective ISS program.
**Student-teacher ratio:**
An ISS program should have one supervising teacher per 8 to 12 referred students (Vanderslice, 1999). Students who have chronic behavioral problems often have difficulty adjusting to different personalities and need a consistent mentor to help and encourage them to change their behavior.

The supervising teacher should be a certified professional and have a background in special education or counseling. According to Gootman (1995), it is important for teachers to play a supportive role and act as a resource to students. If the number of students referred to your ISS program typically exceeds 12 students, consider having two separate ISS rooms with one serving 9th & 10th graders and the other serving 11th & 12th graders.

**Holding students accountable for their schoolwork:**
School staff should develop a user-friendly procedure that facilitates the completion of class work by the students assigned to ISS. The following steps will provide a framework for your accountability system:

- Work should be checked for completion by the ISS teacher and routed back to the teacher who provided the assignment.
- All work must be completed before a student leaves ISS.
- Additional assignments provided in ISS may be used to address some of the specific behaviors that put the student in ISS in the first place, such as writing assignments focused on effective problem-solving strategies.
- If students complete their assignments before the end of the day, they can read for enjoyment as an acknowledgment of their efforts. Have magazines of interest to students or the daily newspaper on hand for students who have completed work.

**Students with Individualized Education Plans in ISS:**
Schools are required to ensure that students in ISS continue to receive instruction that they would otherwise receive if they were in their classroom. Specifically, they must be permitted access to the educational services included in their individualized educational plans.
**Addressing Non-compliance:**
If a student continues to exhibit inappropriate behavior while ISS, this misbehavior must be addressed. Frequently, inappropriate behaviors are ignored, which sends the wrong message to other students in the room and communicates acceptance of these behaviors. The following steps can form a framework for developing your own sequence of disciplinary responses for the ISS program:

- Students who exhibit inappropriate behavior should be given instruction regarding the rules and regulations of the room and should be provided the opportunity to practice and be acknowledged for following the expectations of the ISS program.

- If a student continues to exhibit problem behavior, he or she should be given a firm warning.

- If the inappropriate behavior continues, the ISS teacher should request support. Counselors are not disciplinarians, but they should be called first to help manage the student’s behavior. A clear line needs to be drawn between the counselor and the administrator. Counselors deal with behavior from a therapeutic standpoint and provide compassion and understanding; administrators enforce the rules and regulations of the school. Both are needed for the discipline process to be effective.

**Assigning Students to ISS:**
ISS is often used as a holding area where there are little or no requirements or work expectations. If this is the case, students may begin to prefer ISS over the classroom. Students should not be allowed to assign themselves to ISS due to conflicts with a particular teacher, or because they refuse to do class work. The disciplinarian of the school has the responsibility of assigning the day and time a student should report to ISS.

*Administrators should be the only staff members with the authority to assign students to the ISS room.*
References


Additional Resources
Guidelines in Washington DC for In School Suspension
http://www.k12.dc.us/Dcps/programs/iss.html

Creating Safe & Responsive Schools
http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/publication.html