

# Keep Kids in School: Making the Case for Positive Approaches to School Discipline

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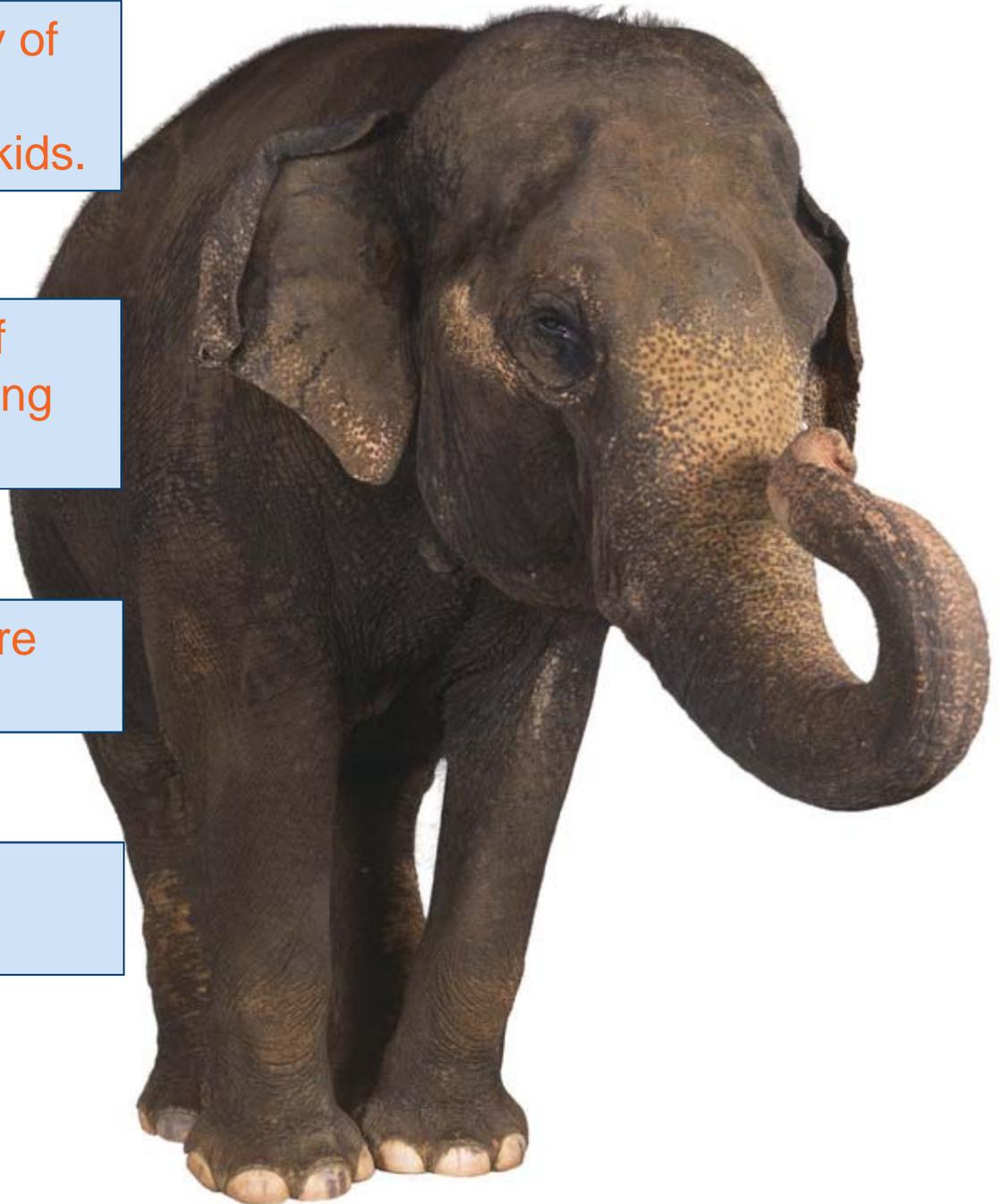


The overwhelming majority of you are working in schools because you want to help kids.

You are facing a number of challenges that make helping kids hard.

School discipline issues are one of those challenges.

You need actionable strategies... NOW.



There is no silver bullet solution to address school discipline, unfortunately.

There are promising approaches though.

Many of those approaches are compatible with other school efforts.



# Agenda



**1** About School Discipline

**2** Latest Research on School Discipline

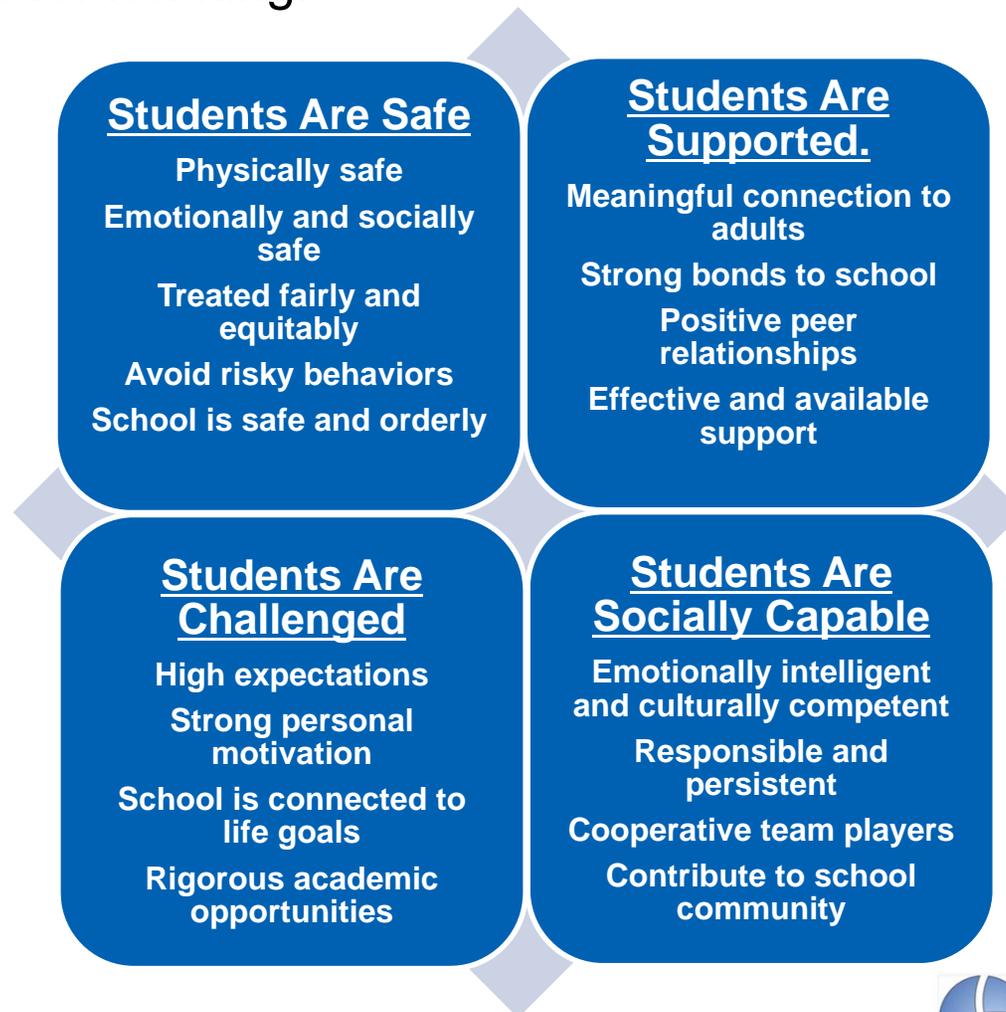
**3** Strategies for Making Change

**4** Activity

# Context for Schools



- Academic success for all students is imperative and is affected by the conditions for learning.



# Context for Schools



- Academic success for all students is imperative and is affected by the conditions for learning.
- Most schools are implementing new curricula based on the Common Core Standards, and they will not realize significant success without addressing student needs and improving conditions for learning.
- Schools are having to balance between the needs and strengths of students and education initiatives.
- **Doing something is not in question.**
- **How to do it is.**
  - There is solid evidence for improving academic achievement via safe and supportive learning environments.
  - Safe supportive learning environments can serve as a protective factor (reduce chance of suspensions) or a risk factor (increase racial disparities).

# Context of School Discipline



- Violence and problematic behavior exists in schools.
- It is imperative students are emotionally and physically safe.
- **Doing something is not in question.**
- **How to do it is.**
  - Research demonstrates that reactive and punitive approaches are ineffective and can have a long-term impact of students and society.
  - Many police and judges are interested in advancing school discipline reform in order to keep youth in school and out of prison.

# What the Research Tells Us: Overall



- Approximately 2 million students in the U.S. were suspended in SY 2009-10.
- 1 out of 9 students in secondary schools were suspended at least once that year.
- Annual rates of suspension are at an all time high and have **nearly tripled** since 1970 even as the rates of serious offenses and arrests have remained steady.
- Serious offenses represent a very small proportion of disciplinary actions in schools.
- Most suspensions and office discipline referrals are for minor or moderate violations.

## What Research Says: Overall (cont.)



- Similar schools suspend and expel students at different rates.
- Many schools and districts have relatively low suspension rates.
- But there also are a high number of schools that also have high rates of suspension.

# Theories for Rise in Punitive Approaches



## ■ **Development of zero tolerance policies**

- Trend to be more punitive overall (e.g., antidrug efforts of 1980s)
- Highly publicized school shootings
- Implementation and expanded interpretation of the Gun Free Schools Act

## ■ **Maintenance of policies**

- Pressure to improve overall academic achievement rates
- Avoid legal liability



**Have your ODR,  
suspension, and/or  
expulsion rates been  
increasing?**



# What Research Says: Disparities



## ■ Racially

- **1 in 4** black high school students and **1 in 3** black, middle school, male students were suspended at least once in 2009-2010; American Indians are also suspended at high rates as well.
- Race, not just class
- Not due to higher levels of misbehavior
  - More prevalent in discretionary discipline and subjective offenses (e.g., defiance)
- Affected by implicit bias and stereotype priming
- School factors

## ■ Male, more than female

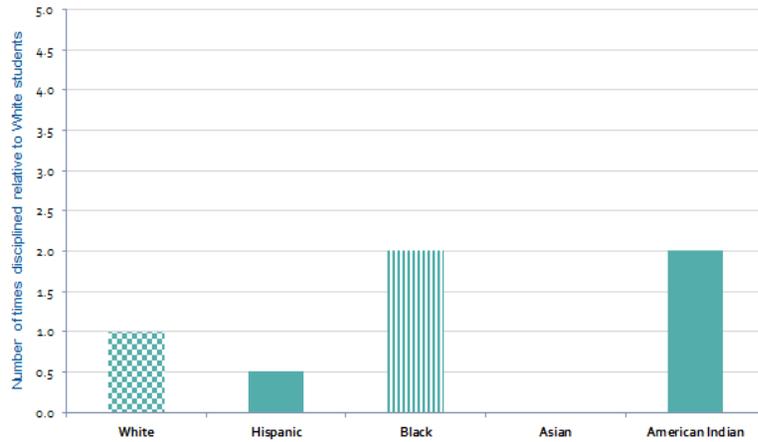
## ■ Disability status

- **1 in 5** secondary school students with disabilities was suspended -- nearly 3 times the rate of all students without disabilities
- EBD more than other disabilities

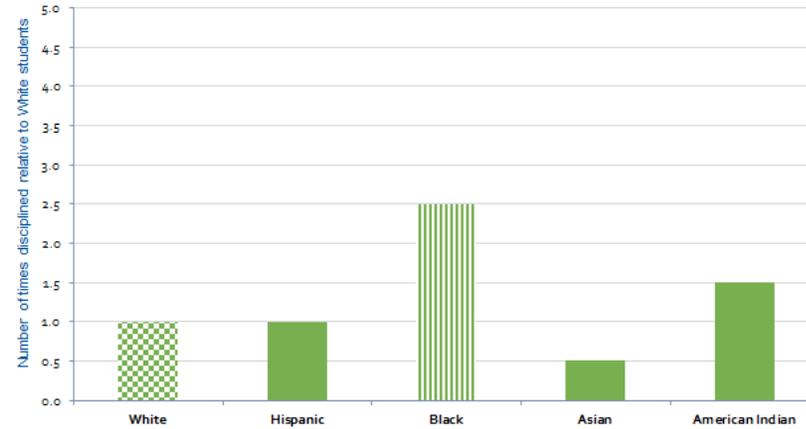
# Risk Ratios



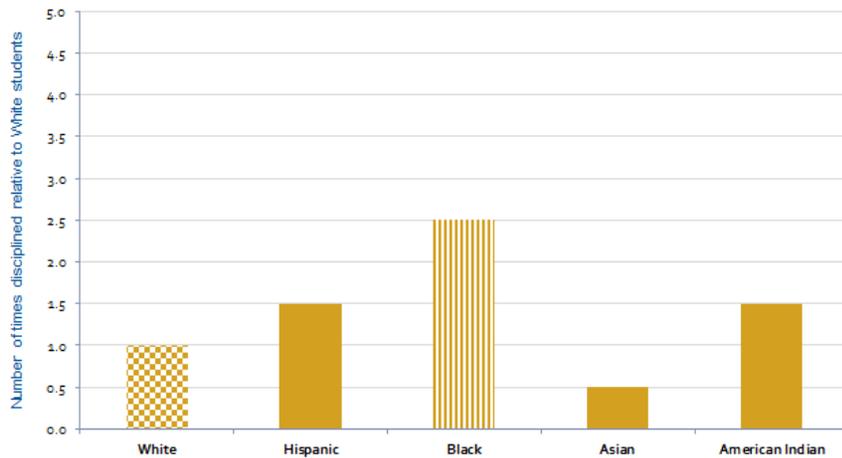
**Corporal punishment**



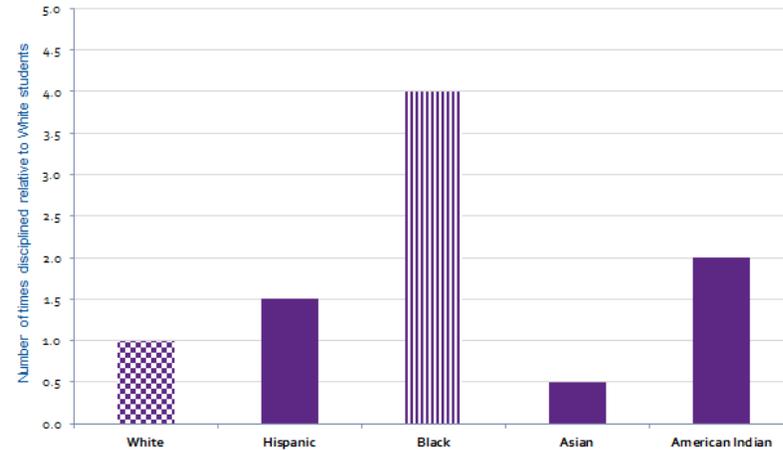
**In-school suspension**



**Out-of-school suspension (single)**



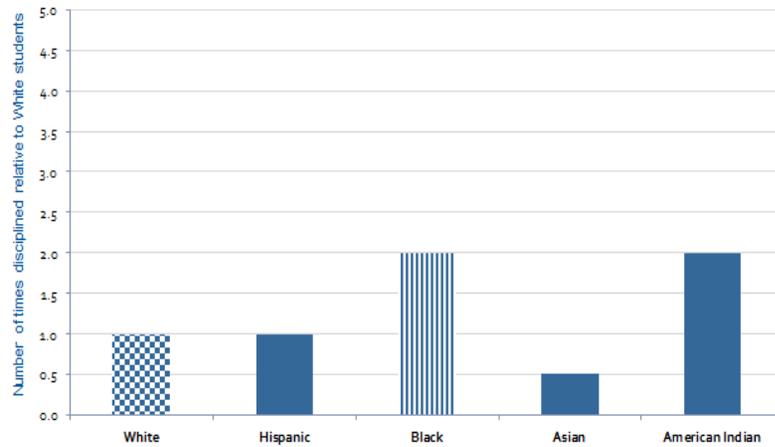
**Out-of-school suspension (multiple)**



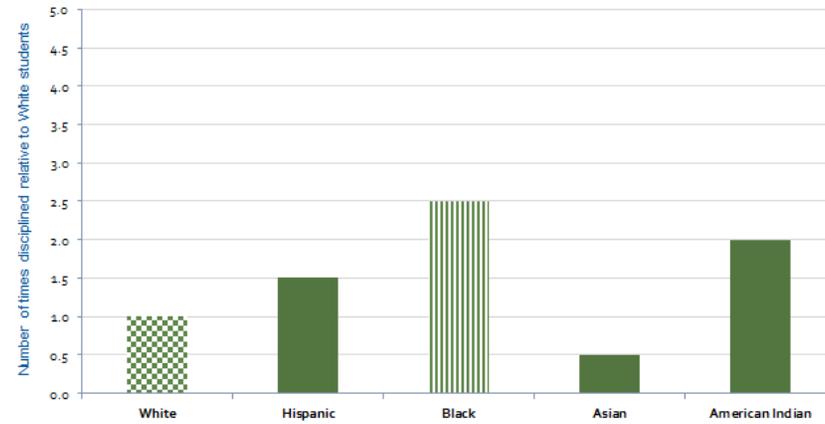
# Risk Ratios



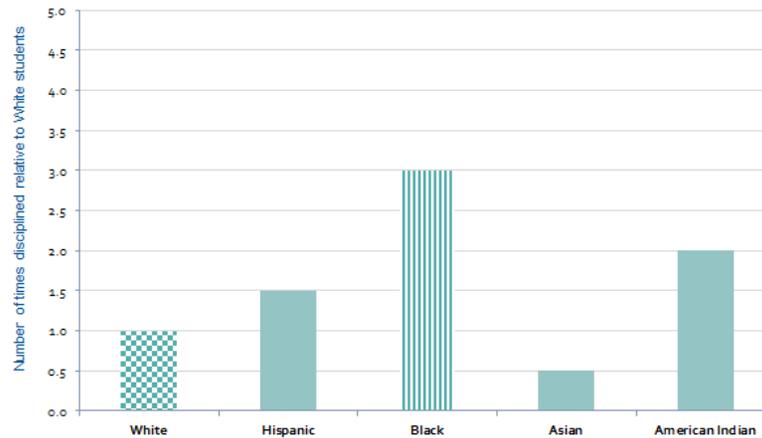
Referral to law enforcement



School-related arrest



Expulsion





**Are you seeing  
disparities in your  
discipline data?**



# What Research Says: Impact of Punitive Approaches to Discipline



## ■ Impact on Students

- Future disciplinary issues not deterred
- Loss of instructional time
- Poor academic achievement
- Drop out
- Incarceration (often referred to as the “school to prison pipeline”)

## ■ Impact on Society

- Youth are less prepared/able to positively contribute to society as adults
- Costs of incarceration, including court time, are high

# What Researchers Have Learned About Improving Outcomes



- **Build assets and protective factors**
- **Reduce or eliminate risk factors and disparities**
- **Promote:**
  - students' social and emotional competence
  - connectedness
- **Partner with youth, families and communities**
- **Build *and support* staff cultural competence and capacity to support and engage students**

## To Improve Those Outcomes...



- **Collect and use disaggregated data**
- **Align interventions via collaboration within and across systems**
- **Act strategically**
- **Employ a three-tiered approach to promotion and prevention that:**
  - *aligns* academic and social and emotional learning and support
  - provides students with the skills, motivation and support to manage their behavior and drive their learning
  - allows for targeted universalism

# Impact of Efforts to Advance Positive Approaches to Discipline: Samples



- **Many schools implementing PBIS have seen overall reductions in discipline referrals.**
  - LA Unified School District implemented PBIS, including coaching and consistent data analysis, and reduced suspensions to well below the required 8%. Some schools reduced suspension rates from triple digits to a single suspension in a year.
- **Clayton County, GA:** Collaborative, multi system approach to develop an MOU and regularly assess needs of students has led to referral rate decrease by 67.4 % and residual felony rate decrease by 30.8 percent, 83% improvement in behavior and 23% improvement in math and reading scores.
- **Bethlehem, PA:** After a couple of large urban schools implemented restorative practices, suspensions, fights, bullying and assaults decreased after steady increases over the past two years. Similar results for schools in Denver and Philadelphia.



**Are your positive  
approaches to  
discipline showing  
results?**



# Overall Strategic Framework: Multi-Tiered Approaches to Discipline (e.g., SWPBIS)



## Academic Systems

### Intensive, Individual Interventions

- Individual Students
- Assessment-based
- High Intensity

### Targeted Group Interventions

- Some students (at-risk)
- High efficiency
- Rapid response

### Universal Interventions

- All students
- Preventive, proactive

## Behavioral Systems

### Intensive, Individual Interventions

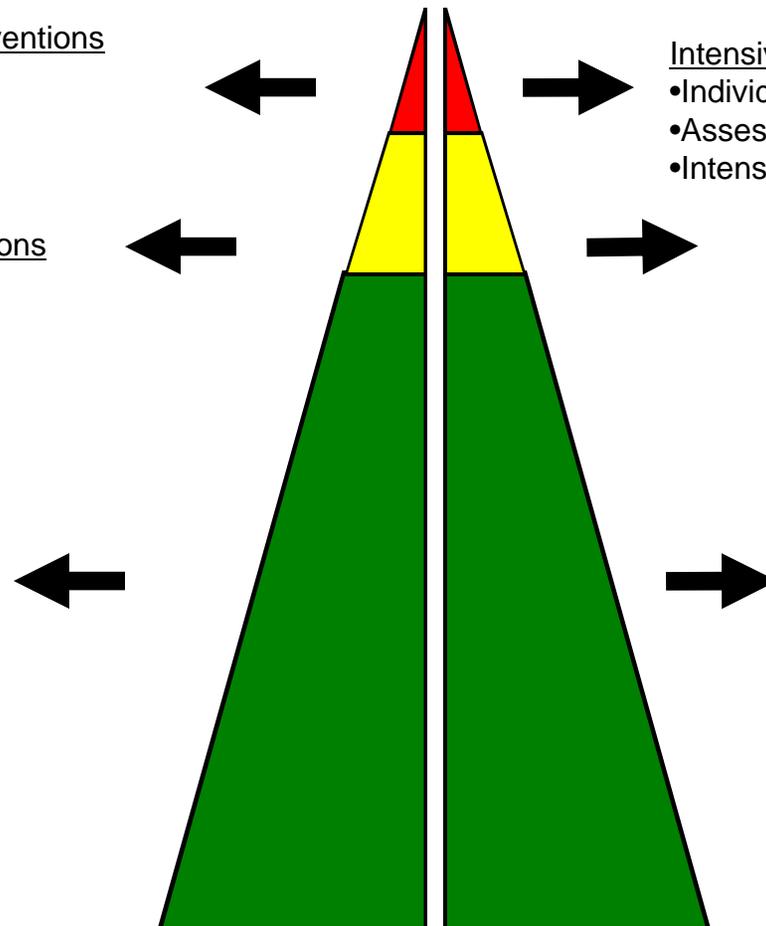
- Individual Students
- Assessment-based
- Intense, durable procedures

### Targeted Interventions

- Some students (at-risk)
- High efficiency
- Rapid response
- Individual or Group

### Universal Interventions

- All settings, all students
- Preventive, proactive



# Overall Strategic Framework: Multi-Tiered Approaches to Discipline



## **Multi-tiered approaches to discipline incorporate both preventative approaches and targeted behavioral supports.**

- Lowest tier aimed at all students.
  - Defining and teaching expectations for behavior
  - Rewarding positive behavior
  - In some cases, teach character education or social-emotional learning principles (e.g., empathy, communication skills)
  
- Upper tier(s) are targeted behavioral supports for students exhibiting problem behaviors.

# Tier 1: Teach New Behaviors



- **Use character education and social skill building to reduce the risk of violence and misbehavior**
- **Provide targeted behavioral supports for students who are at-risk for involvement in a serious incident**
- **Identify staff norms that contribute to a positive school climate and reinforce, reward, and hold staff accountable for those behaviors. For example:**
  - high expectations for all students
  - positive approaches to discipline
  - no display of anger or sarcasm
  - model pro-social behavior
  - no bullying or harassment

## Tier 2/3: Crisis Intervention



**Because situations can escalate you need to:**

- **Have a plan: district wide, school wide, classroom, and individual crisis plan**
- **Have trained personnel who understand the plan, and react accordingly**
- **Have a clear plan when and where to call the police or other emergency response teams**
- **Have periodic test runs and evaluation of the plans**

## Tier 2/3: Alternatives to Suspension



- **Extended day programming**
- **Saturday Academy**
- **School-based Service Learning**
- **Community-based Service Learning**
- **Planning Centers**
- **Restorative Justice**
- **Teen Courts**

# Overall Strategic Framework: Multi-Tiered Approaches to Discipline (cont.)



- **Several of these programs have been extensively researched, particularly 3-Tiered Models such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).**
- **Evaluations of multi-tiered approaches have found that these programs:**
  - Improve social behavior and social skills
  - Reduce referrals for discipline problems
  - Reduce aggressive behavior
  - Improve academic outcomes
  - Have lasting impacts



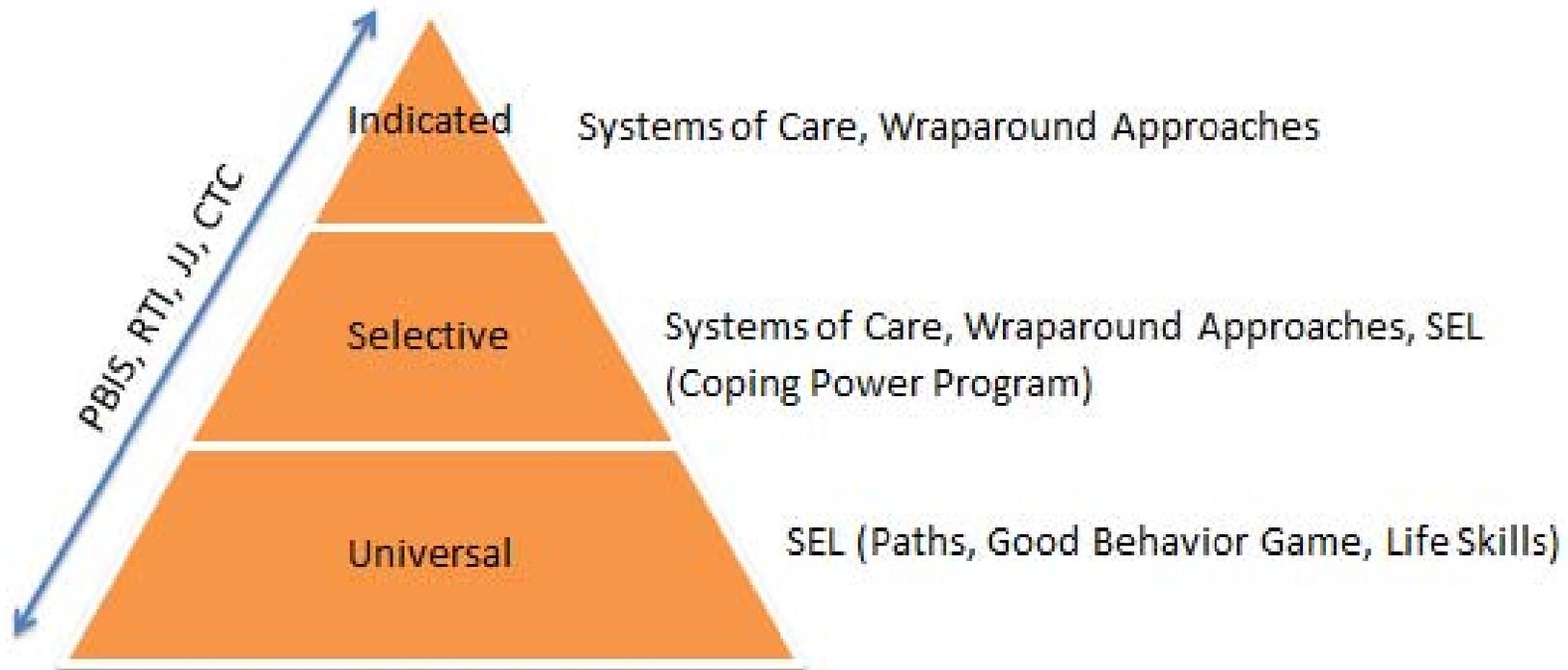
# How is your MTSS Implementation going?



# Strategy 1: Integrate Programmatic Interventions



- **Collaborate with staff to assess needs and strengths of the school and community and current programmatic interventions.**



## Strategy 2: Align District Policies to MTSS Framework



- Assess culture of district and school.
- Discuss MTSS framework and implications for district policy with district and school leadership.
- Assess discipline codes: one tool is the Analysis of the Discipline Rating Form-Revised.
- Assess fidelity of MTSS implementation (e.g., SWPBIS uses the SET tool).
- Disaggregate discipline data (if PBIS, within SWIS, or other sources of discipline data) on an ongoing basis and use findings to guide actions.
- Collaborate with partners, including teachers and family, and other systems, including law enforcement, courts, and mental health as assess policies.

## Strategy 3: Disaggregate Discipline Data on Ongoing Basis



- **Centralize data and embed data review process within system.**
- **Review data on...**
  - **Whole school population:** Compare students who have never been suspended to those who have. Any trends? Any subgroups emerge?
  - **Number of suspensions and days suspended by different subgroups:** Analyze different racial/ethnic groups, age and review over time to see how long students being suspended and when. Assess the kinds of violations students are being suspended. Consider disaggregating by teacher as well. Consider responses to data and fidelity of assessment.
  - **Punitive responses:** Determine whether violations were consistent with the response.
- **Engage youth, family, and community.**

# School Discipline Violations and Responses



## Violations

- **Attendance violations**
- **Minor offenses**
- **Violations related to possession or use of drugs/alcohol**
- **Property damage**
- **Harassment or threats**
- **Possession or use of a dangerous object**
- **Violent crime**

## Responses

- **Proactive**
  - Teacher conference
  - Community services
  - Counseling
  - Skill building
  - Peer mediation
  - Substance abuse intervention
- **Punitive**
  - Saturday detention
  - In-school suspension
  - Out of school suspension
  - Expulsion
  - Classroom removal
  - Alternative school placement
  - School-based arrest

## Strategy 4: Train Staff



- **Recognize strengths and needs of different staff based on discipline data, survey feedback, and discussions:**
  - District and school leadership
  - Teachers
  - Specialized Instructional Support Personnel
  - School Resource Officers/Law Enforcement
  - Support staff
  - Others
- **Be sure to address the following topics:** adolescent brain development, trauma informed care, cultural and linguistic competence, de-escalating techniques, fidelity of assessment.
- **Develop a plan that is integrated within a system, that includes PD and ongoing engagement in the process.**
- **Follow the plan.**
- **Assess training.**

## Strategy 5: Support Positive Partnerships between Schools and Law Enforcement (if located in schools)



### ■ Collaborate to establish an MOU and Standard Operating Procedures

- Helps to prevent confusion between schools and law enforcement, decrease conflict between agencies, avoid implementation issues, provide clear expectations on a daily basis, and maintain focus on positive student outcomes.

### ■ MOU can include:

- Mission of SRO program
- Goals and objectives that are aligned with school and student strengths and needs, including integrating in schoolwide efforts and discussing student rights.
- Roles and responsibilities by location in the school and situation (e.g., crisis, truancy)
- Level of effort based on available funds
- Governance structure
- Process for selecting SROs
- Training requirements
- Accountability

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## Strategy 5: Support Positive Partnerships between Schools and Law Enforcement (if located in schools)



### ■ SOP's can include:

- How to differentiate between school discipline and legal response
- Who the officer reports to
- How and when it is appropriate to arrest students and use force
- How to communicate and collaborate with school staff, families and community
- What officers are required to wear
- How to search or question students
- What to do in case of an emergency



**Based on where you are, which system strategy do you most need to implement first?**



# Strategy 6: Build Relationships with Students



## Levels of relationships and influence:

- Level 1 - Inviting a relationship
  - Basic positive social interaction
- Level 2 – Nurturing the relationship and building trust
  - Taking a personal interest in the student
  - Demonstrating respect and empathy
  - Understanding needs
  - Treating students fairly
  - Identifying and encouraging gifts and talents
- Level 3 – Leveraging the relationship
  - Challenging them
  - Mentoring them
  - Maintaining contact

# Strategy 7: Adopt Behavior Change Process (Tiers 2/3)



- Determine the function of the behavior.
- Be able to describe the behavior in observable terms.
- Have a measure of frequency, intensity, and duration of the behavior.
- Develop a plan for intervention to decrease the inappropriate behavior and intervention (teach) to increase the appropriate behavior.
  - The function will help you to determine an intervention plan.
- Be consistent, evaluate fidelity of assessment, and change plan as needed.

## Functions of Behavior

- Developmental
- Related to disability (such as LD or MH need)
- Learned response
- Escape/work avoidance
- Sensory: visual or auditory stimuli/Sensitive to touch
- Level of activity/agitation/arousal
- Attention getting or peer acceptance
- Power/control Issues
- Revenge/anger
- Self fulfilling
- Ineffectiveness of program

## Strategy 8: Reduce Risks



- Teach alternate ways of dealing with stressors or “triggers”.
- Increase the frequency of positive interactions with caring adults and peers.
- Teach about the “escalation cycle” to students and staff, so they can understand what happens and recognize signs earlier in the cycle.

## Strategy 8: Reduce Risks-- Deescalation Techniques



- **Fight or Flight Response** – Our body's primitive, automatic, inborn response that prepares the body to "fight" or "flee" from perceived attack, harm or threat to our survival
- **What happens in our brains** – This response actually corresponds to an area of our brain called the hypothalamus, which—when stimulated—initiates a sequence of nerve cell firings and chemical release that prepares our body for running or fighting.

## Strategy 8: Reduce Risks-- Deescalation Techniques (cont.)



### *Understanding Fight or Flight Response*

- **Sequences of nerve cell firings occur and chemicals, like adrenaline, nor epinephrine and cortisol, are released into our bloodstream**
- **Body undergoes a series of changes:**
  - Respiratory rate increases; heart rate increases
  - Blood is directed into our muscles and limbs
  - Pupils dilate; awareness intensifies; sight sharpens
  - Impulses quicken; perception of pain diminishes
- **We become prepared—physically and psychologically—for fight or flight. We scan and search our environment, "looking for the enemy."**

## Strategy 8: Reduce Risks-- Deescalation Techniques (cont.)



### ***Understand Response to Fight or Flight Response***

- Fight or flight system bypasses our rational mind—where our more well thought out beliefs exist—and moves us into "attack" mode.
- This state of alertness causes us to perceive almost everything in our world as a possible threat.
- We tend to see everyone and everything as a possible enemy.
- We may overreact to the slightest comment. Our fear is exaggerated. Our thinking is distorted.

## Strategy 8: Reduce Risks-- Deescalation Techniques (cont.)



### *Things to consider when responding*

- Your attitude and beliefs (personal experiences with behavior, discipline and punishment)
- School policies and culture (requires conversations to get some common agreements among school staff about what “they” believe about behavior)
- Cultural competence and responsiveness (students may not hear it the way it was intended based on their own experiences)
- Students’ needs and experiences (based on risk factors and environment)
- The specific situation (some are highly escalated and require safety first)



**Do you have a story  
of time one of those  
strategies worked for  
you or a colleague?**



# Activity

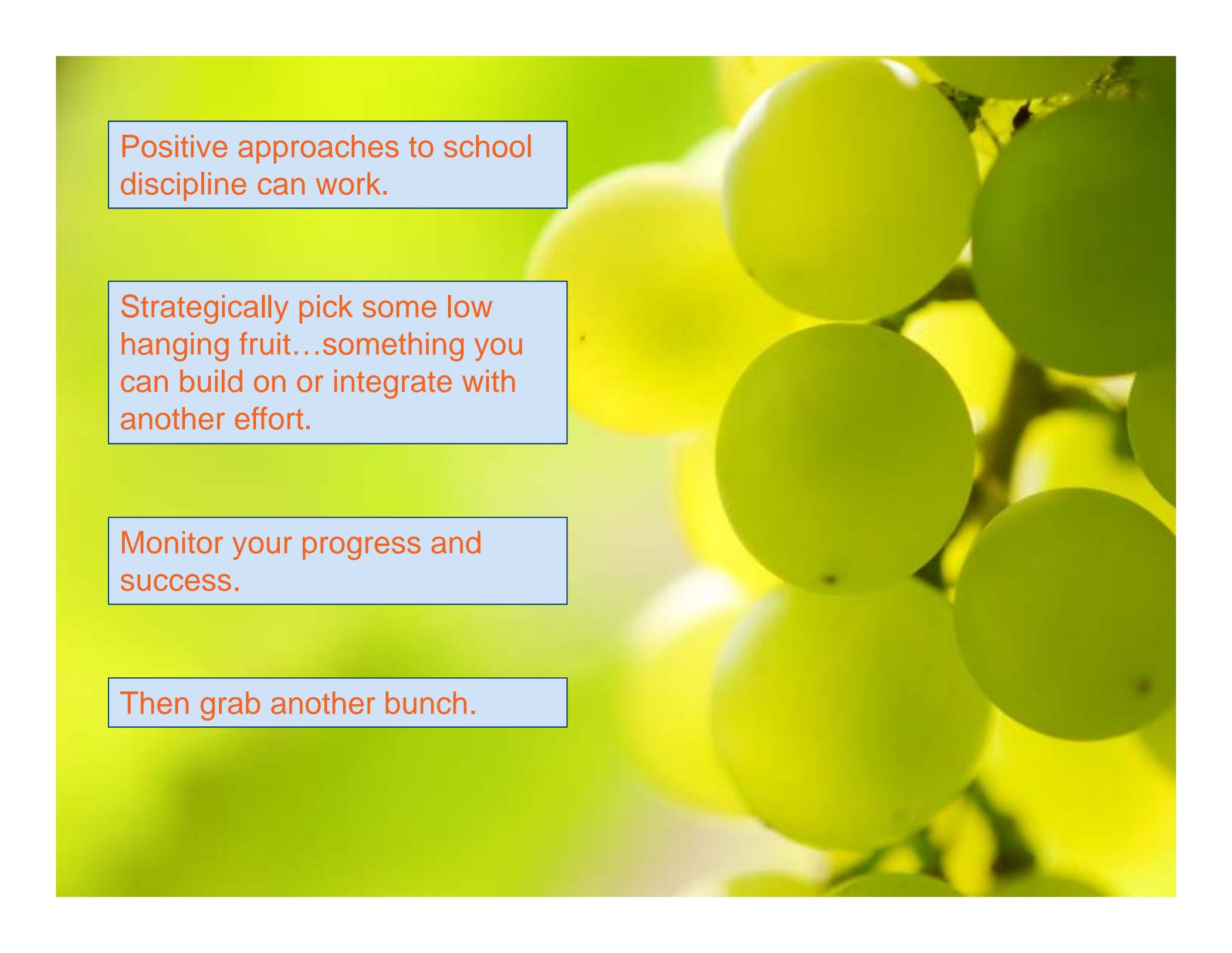


- **Discuss with table:**

- What data do you need to review?
- How can you collaborate to advance supportive school discipline approaches?
- What strategy do you think you should prioritize?
- What do you need to make change?

- **Report out:**

- By question, do round robin to report out.



Positive approaches to school discipline can work.

Strategically pick some low hanging fruit...something you can build on or integrate with another effort.

Monitor your progress and success.

Then grab another bunch.

# Resources



- **National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE):** provide TA on school climate and related risk factors, including school discipline, bullying, and substance use  
<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>
- **Supportive School Webinar Series:**  
<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/supportive-school-discipline-webinar-series> (new webinars coming in January- Stay Tuned!)
- NCSSLE Staff:  
Greta Colombi: 202-403-5123, [gcolombi@air.org](mailto:gcolombi@air.org)  
Kelly Wells: [kwells@air.org](mailto:kwells@air.org)