



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM · EIGHT SESSIONS

THE CASE FOR THIS PROGRAM

BEHAVIOR, EXCLUSION, AND THE DESIRE TO LEARN

No young man is expelled for one thing. He is written up, then written up again, then suspended, then placed somewhere else, then he stops coming. Every step in that sequence begins in a single moment, and it is almost always the same moment: he is corrected, embarrassed, or disrespected in front of people, and he answers it.

The Standard Youth Development Program is built to change what happens in that moment. This brief sets out what the research says about the sequence, where it can be interrupted, and what this program proposes to measure. Every figure is sourced. Where the evidence is strong it is stated plainly; where it is not, that is stated too.

THE SEQUENCE

The largest study of school discipline ever conducted followed nearly one million Texas public secondary students for at least six years, linking their school records to juvenile justice records.

6 in 10

were suspended or expelled at least once between grades 7 and 12

~50%

of students disciplined 11 or more times entered the juvenile justice system

40%

was the graduation rate for students disciplined 11 or more times

A student's likelihood of juvenile justice involvement rose significantly in the year following a suspension or expulsion. Thirty-one percent of students disciplined even once repeated a grade.

THE FINDING THAT MATTERS MOST

Suspension and expulsion rates varied significantly between schools serving similar students with similar characteristics. The sequence is not a property of the young men. It is a property of what happens in the room. That is why it can be changed.

Fabelo T, Thompson MD, Plotkin M, Carmichael D, Marchbanks MP, Booth EA. Breaking Schools' Rules. Council of State Governments Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A&M University, 2011.

WHO IT LANDS ON

Federal civil rights data show the weight of exclusionary discipline falling on one group more than any other.

Black boys, share of K-12 enrollment against share of students suspended**8%**

Share of national K-12 enrollment

22%

Share receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions

The same group accounted for 21 percent of students expelled and 18 percent of those receiving in-school suspension.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Civil Rights Data Collection, 2021–22.

WHERE IT ENDS

Removal from the classroom is often framed as a reset. The outcome data do not support that framing. Students assigned to disciplinary alternative education programs have the lowest four-year graduation rates of any disciplined group, and are more likely to drop out, be arrested, and be incarcerated than students who are not placed. On average they lose roughly twenty-seven days of regular classroom instruction. Studies of placement outcomes have found academic averages falling, attendance declining, and discipline incidents increasing after placement.

Intercultural Development Research Association and Southern Poverty Law Center analyses of Texas disciplinary alternative education program outcomes; peer-reviewed placement studies in *School Social Work Journal*, 2016.

THE DESIRE TO LEARN GOES FIRST

Before a young man is removed, he usually withdraws. Gallup's student engagement data track that withdrawal by grade with unusual clarity.

~8 in 10

elementary students report being engaged in school

~6 in 10

middle school students report being engaged

~4 in 10

high school students report being engaged

The sharpest single-year drops occur in the middle school years. Alongside that decline, 33 percent of eighth-graders now read below the NAEP Basic level, the largest share on record, and 22.6 percent of students were chronically absent in 2025 against roughly 15 percent before 2020.

Gallup Student Poll · National Assessment Governing Board, NAEP 2024 Reading · American Enterprise Institute, chronic absenteeism tracking, 2025 (45 states reporting).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUPPORTS

01 CHANGING THE RESPONSE TO CONFLICT REDUCES SUSPENSIONS

A cluster randomized controlled trial across a mid-sized urban district found that a whole-school restorative practices program produced a 16 percent reduction in school-level suspension rates and narrowed discipline disparities by race, alongside improved teacher-rated school climate.

The same trial found no improvement in academic outcomes, and no reduction in suspensions for middle school students or for violent offenses. The effect is real and it is bounded.

Augustine CH et al. Can Restorative Practices Improve School Climate and Curb Suspensions? RAND Corporation, 2018.

02 STRUCTURED SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INSTRUCTION REDUCES CONDUCT PROBLEMS

A meta-analysis of 213 school-based programs covering 270,034 students found a mean effect size of 0.23 for reduced conduct problems and an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement. A later meta-analysis of 82 interventions covering 97,406 students found benefits persisting from six months to eighteen years after the program ended.

Programs were delivered successfully by school staff rather than outside clinicians, which is the delivery model this program uses.

Durlak JA et al., Child Development, 2011;82(1):405-432 · Taylor RD et al., Child Development, 2017.

03 MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE BEHAVIOR, AND THE EFFECTS PERSIST

Big Brothers Big Sisters Community-Based Mentoring has been evaluated in two randomized controlled trials, each with more than 1,000 young people. The more recent trial found reductions of 20 to 40 percent in substance use and delinquent behavior four years after study entry. The earlier trial found effects on school grades, fighting, and days of school skipped at eighteen months.

The independent review Social Programs That Work rates the program Near Top Tier and notes that both studies carry limitations, making the combined findings highly promising but not definitive.

Tierney & Grossman, Public/Private Ventures, 1995 · DuBois, Herrera et al., University of Illinois Chicago, 2025 · Social Programs That Work, review updated February 2026.

04 CONNECTION IS A MEASURED PROTECTIVE FACTOR, NOT A SOFT ONE

CDC data show that students who felt close to people at school reported persistent sadness at 35.4 percent against 52.9 percent among those who did not, and suicidal ideation at 14.0 percent against 25.6 percent. Only 61.5 percent of students reported feeling that connection at all.

CDC, Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, January-June 2021, MMWR Suppl 2022;71(3):16-21 · CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2021, MMWR Suppl 2023;72(1):13-21.

WHERE THE EIGHT SESSIONS INTERVENE

Each session sits at a specific point in the sequence described above.

SESSION	FOCUS	POINT IN THE SEQUENCE
1	Influence	What makes the reaction feel normal in the first place
2	Reaction and consequences	The moment that produces the write-up
3	Emotional control	The pause between the feeling and the response
4	Discipline	The consistency that keeps small problems small
5	School engagement	Attendance, literacy, and asking for help without shame
6	Purpose and direction	A reason to stay that outlasts a bad week
7	Mentorship	The adult who intervenes before the placement
8	Belonging	The connection that keeps him in the building

WHAT WE PROPOSE TO MEASURE

Every measure below already exists in your student information system. The program adds no new data collection burden, and the comparison is straightforward: the term before the program against the term during and the term after.

MEASURE	SOURCE	WHAT IT WOULD SHOW
Office discipline referrals	School records	Whether the moment is changing
Out-of-school suspension days	School records	Whether escalation is slowing
Alternative placement referrals	School records	Whether removal is being avoided
Unexcused absences	School records	Whether he is still showing up
Course failures	School records	Whether engagement is holding
Participant pulse	Program form	What he says has changed

WHAT THIS PROGRAM HAS NOT YET SHOWN

STATED PLAINLY

The research above establishes that the discipline sequence is real, that it is not fixed, and that programs changing how young people handle conflict have reduced suspensions and conduct problems elsewhere. It does not establish that this particular program reduces referrals, placements, or dropout. No controlled trial of The Standard Youth Development Program has been conducted, and no claim is made here that one has.

What the program offers now is a curriculum aimed squarely at the moment where the sequence starts, delivered by staff who already know the young men, and a measurement plan built on records the school already keeps. Partner organizations receive a written summary of their own results, favorable or not. That is how the evidence base for this program gets built, and there is no shortcut to it.

SOURCES

- Fabelo T, Thompson MD, Plotkin M, Carmichael D, Marchbanks MP, Booth EA. Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement. Council of State Governments Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A&M University, 2011.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Civil Rights Data Collection, 2021-22 School Discipline and School Climate Report.
- Augustine CH, Engberg J, Grimm GE, et al. Can Restorative Practices Improve School Climate and Curb Suspensions? RAND Corporation, RR-2840, 2018.
- Durlak JA, Weissberg RP, Dymnicki AB, Taylor RD, Schellinger KB. The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development* 2011;82(1):405-432.
- Taylor RD, Oberle E, Durlak JA, Weissberg RP. Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects. *Child Development* 2017.
- Tierney JP, Grossman JB. Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters. Public/Private Ventures, 1995.
- DuBois DL, Herrera C, Rivera J, Brechling V, Root S. Randomized Controlled Trial of the Effects of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Community-Based Mentoring Program on Crime and Delinquency: Four-Year Findings. University of Illinois Chicago, 2025.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mental Health, Suicidality, and Connectedness Among High School Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *MMWR Supplements* 2022;71(3):16-21.
- Intercultural Development Research Association. Why Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs Do More Harm Than Good.
- Southern Poverty Law Center. Ending the Unequal System of Disciplinary Alternative Education.
- Gallup. Gallup Student Poll: school engagement by grade level.
- National Assessment Governing Board. The 2024 Nation's Report Card: Reading, Grades 4 and 8.
- American Enterprise Institute. Tracking Post-Pandemic Chronic Absenteeism into 2025.