

PHASE IV The Construction

Implementing the Program

The path to a completed construction project is paved with lots of challenges and uncertainty. In fact, the construction phase is often the most anxiety-producing part of the entire building process. Until now, the project has been confined to intense discussion, planning, and two-dimensional renderings. When construction begins, the project moves from an abstraction to a physical reality. There are literally hundreds of decisions to be made, decisions which have a strong impact on how the project looks and functions over time. Making all these decisions may seem overwhelming, however, others have gone through this process before. Program implementation is similar to the construction process because at this point the program director is looking for groups and individuals with the knowledge base and skills to assist in carrying out the plan. Once those people have been located, all persons involved need to have a clear knowledge and understanding of goals and objectives of the program.

In order to enhance community support, the program director must involve community members by delegating specific responsibilities. This is important because it allows community members to become vested in the problem and solution while giving the program director the ability to oversee the larger implementation. With everyone having assigned responsibilities and tasks, review of successes and challenges can be achieved more effectively and in a more structured setting.

As implementation is carried out, staff should receive feedback at regular intervals, especially early in the initiative's development, so adjustments can be made quickly to improve the initiative's results. Feedback sessions should be scheduled at least once a month for the first year and then perhaps on a quarterly basis. Providing feedback often gives staff the opportunity to observe changes and promotes collaboration to continuously improve efforts.

Administration needs to be aware of staff members' individual strengths and weaknesses in achieving the end goal. In understanding staff strengths and weaknesses, it is critical to focus on opportunities to develop staff professionally to work effectively in the alternative-to-suspension program.

A Lesson Learned from the DisMISS Project Utilizing Staff Developments

Conflict in today's schools can be detrimental to existing opportunities for teachers to teach and students to learn in a caring and safe environment. To become better prepared to handle conflict, DisMISS Project staff provided participating schools with staff development on the Reach to Teach process for managing conflict. The Reach to Teach process includes the following:

Reach In: Encouraging the evaluation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors and realizing how they impact conflict management style.

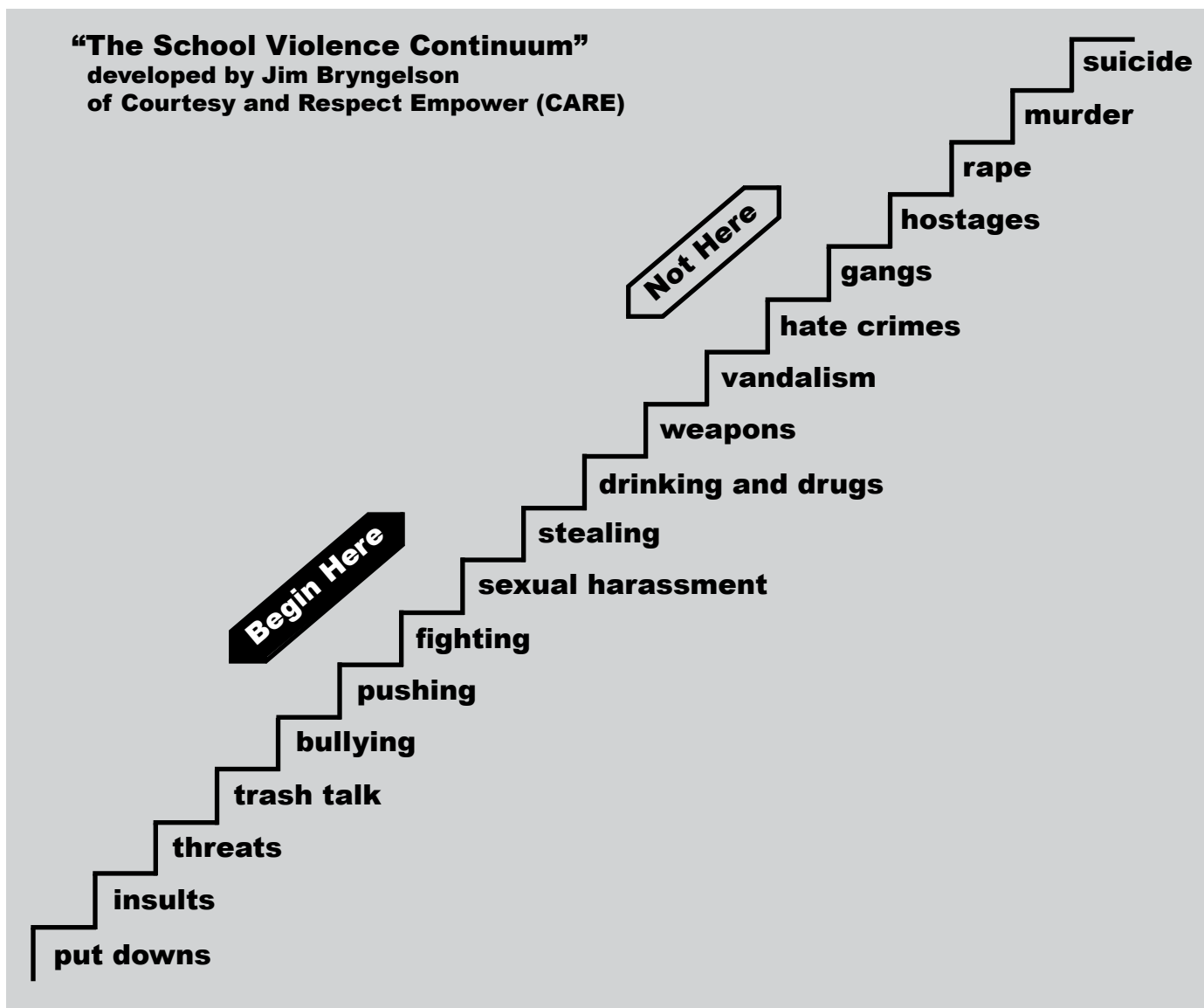
Reach Out: Understanding the importance of active and reflective listening, building trust and maintaining a good rapport with students.

Reach Over: Providing teachers with the tools to effectively manage conflict.

Other staff developments provided to schools by DisMISS Project staff included: gang awareness; bullying prevention; understanding the youth culture; innovative teaching techniques; and cultural competency.

Important dynamics to consider include the teacher’s background and experience. The first mechanism to assist in “bringing staff up to speed” is through providing staff development trainings aimed at modifying teacher reactions to potential situations that could lead to a suspension or expulsion. The most noteworthy staff development provided by DJJDP – Center staff for alternative-to-suspension programs was on conflict management. This staff development focused on how the individual must understand the dynamics of conflict and opportunities to assess oneself, communicate effectively, and manage conflict in the classroom.

Addressing the problem of increasing suspension and expulsion rates is challenging. One of the existing challenges starts with the capacity of the school to address problems proactively and ensure that staff believes in early prevention. The Violence Continuum focuses on the importance of intervening with incidents such as insults, bullying and “put downs,” to prevent more violent occurrences. Alternative-to-suspension programs should consider the violence continuum and early prevention as they attempt to assess practices, programs, and policies.



Various policies and procedures may need to be adjusted to ensure program success. Periodic reviews of policies and procedures are critical to the success of any program. This does not have to be formal in process. It does, however, call for the collaborative work group to come together with program staff. Discussions by this group should be driven by the plan that was created prior to the implementation but should focus on the policies and procedures set in place for day-to-day operations. During discussions, major issues hindering a smooth program operation should be identified. Once identified, current operating procedures should be revised so that the program can operate more successfully. Communication between the program staff and staff from the student's home school is vital. Procedures must be in place to ensure that open lines of communication exist and information is exchanged in a productive manner.

Research reveals a strong connection between parent and family involvement in schools and children's academic achievement, attendance, attitude, and continued education. However, families may not become involved if they do not feel that the social and educational atmosphere of a program makes them feel welcomed, respected, and needed. If the program is not seeing successful parental involvement, then the workgroup must determine if revising existing practices will help increase this collaboration.

The following tools are included to assist the implementation phase:

Tool 1 - Program Brochure Sample

- A sample program brochure from Burke County Schools Burke Alternatives-to-Suspension (BATS)

Tool 2 - Ways to Engage Parents

- Suggested strategies to promote parental involvement

Tool 3 - Behavior Contract

- A tool for students to promote positive behavior. The contract is a written agreement between the child, teacher or mentor and parents

Tool 4 - The Punch List: Guiding Questions During Implementation

- Sample questions that may be asked to evaluate implementation and identify areas of concern