

Special Services Department

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St. Francis Area Schools

St. Francis Area Schools ISD#15 Suspension and Expulsion Reduction Plan Progress Update September 2020

The Goal of St. Francis Area Schools is to decrease disproportionality in discipline for students of color and students with disabilities, and to have suspensions and expulsions be considered as a last resort for all students in the district.

St. Francis Area Schools successfully submitted a final draft of a suspension and expulsion reduction plan to the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR). This plan will now be the district's guiding document as we move into the implementation process. The district's plan consists of six separate strategies which will assist the district in addressing what it considers to be fundamental opportunities to reach our stated goal. Associated with each strategy, there are key action steps which have been developed to provide structure and timelines to assist the district in maintaining its focus on successfully accomplishing the strategy.

In addition to a general update, this progress report will also provide a summary of progress on each of the six strategies. The year-to-date progress for each of the six Strategies (and the corresponding Key Action Steps) is listed directly below each strategy section of the document.

Strategy #1: Revise and update the School Board Policy 406 - Student Discipline

The current version of Policy 406, which addresses all aspects of student discipline, is scheduled to be reviewed by the school board within the upcoming calendar year. The plan is to review the entire Policy 406 with additional attention and awareness to addressing student discipline issues for students of color and students with disabilities.

Key Action Steps:

- By December 1, 2018 the superintendent will identify a workgroup to manage and facilitate a complete review and update of the Student Discipline Policy 406.

- The work group will make recommendations to the school board's policy review committee regarding policy 406 by April 1, 2019.
- The school board will have the opportunity to seek additional community input into the proposed student discipline policy prior to any action being taken to approve the revised policy.
- The target date for the school board to approve an updated Student Discipline Policy will be June 30 2019. The intent of the final product is to have a student discipline policy which will provide more specific and uniform discipline procedures which also reflect the district's efforts to promote positive behavioral intervention strategies whenever possible as an alternative to suspension. Note: The Policy 406 revision will reaffirm the district's position that School Resource Officers are not involved in recommending or determining student discipline or in the investigation of incidents of student discipline that do not involve a crime.

December 2018 Update on Strategy #1:

The Policy Subcommittee of the school board is aware that a revised policy 406 will be forthcoming upon conclusion of the workgroup. The superintendent is in the process of building the workgroup membership. As a part of this overall process, there are efforts to have this workgroup consist of both district staff as well as community members. Generally, the progress and timeline on Strategy #1 has been delayed due to the impending change in district leadership. The current superintendent has decided to retire from being the superintendent of St. Francis Area Schools at the end of the school year. This change in leadership and the new superintendent search process has temporarily slowed down this portion of our plan.

May 2019 Update on Strategy #1:

At the school board meeting of April 8 2019 the board approved the updated policy 406 - Student Discipline. The policy was extensively revised to reflect current best practice and conformity to state and federal rules and regulations. The district obtained guidance from the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) in the drafting of this revised document. The district leadership team was provided the opportunity for input on all proposed updates. The revised and updated policy was reviewed by the policy review subcommittee of the school board. The final proposed draft was brought forward at two full school board meetings. On the April 8 2019 school board meeting the Student Discipline Policy was approved.

September 2020 Update on Strategy #1

During the Covid 19 pandemic, minimal attention was directed at the continued rollout and implementation related to the Policy 406.

Strategy #2: Provide and/or expand professional development opportunities for school personnel in the area of cultural awareness and cultural competency.

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The first step in changing a culture of student suspensions starts with professional development and training for the teaching staff. There are some opportunities to enhance professional development in the areas of cultural awareness and cultural competency, as outlined in the following action steps.

Key Action Steps:

- By January 15 2019 the district's Professional Development Oversight Team will review each of the following areas, as it relates to training and professional development opportunities for the licensed teaching staff of the district. The desired outcome is to enrich staff understanding for applying culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate strategies into all aspects of instruction and learning.
 - Explore and/or extend collaborative partnerships with outside agencies to provide professional development
 - Provide professional development on Restorative Practices that may include, but are not limited to, age appropriate responses to behavior, de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed practices, equitable learning environment and implicit bias
 - Provide professional development on the Social Emotional Competencies as identified by the MN Department of Education
 - Provide targeted professional development for remedial situations

The outcome of this review and the recommendations for how the district is meeting or will meet this standard will be shared with the Superintendent by February 1, 2019. The superintendent will provide further direction on how to proceed with incorporating these concepts into the staff professional development for the the 2019-20 school year.

- The district is working in coordination with the American Indian Parent Advisory Committee (AIPAC) to increase our efforts to provide early intervention and targeted intervention to this student group. By identifying and training staff on the unique cultural dynamics of the American Indian students, we intend to decrease suspensions and other significant disciplinary actions for these students. This will be accomplished through two specific strategies:
 - The district has been accepted into Project Dream Catcher. This will allow the district to send a team of teachers for training in order to better understand the cultural needs of the American Indian student.
 - The district is planning to increase the American Indian Education Program staff from approximately a .5 FTE position to a full 2.0 FTE team. This will allow for an increased ability to directly intervene with identified students (both academically and behaviorally) in order to minimize education disruptions and gaps in achievement.
- The issue of suspensions for disciplinary reasons concerning special education students will also be a discussion topic for the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEAC) during the 2018-19 school year. All of the information in this action plan, along with suspension data for students with disabilities will be shared with the advisory group. The group will then make recommendations to the director of special education for consideration in planning services for students with disabilities.

December 2018 Update on Strategy #2:

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The district has made significant progress in several areas of this strategy.

- The district's professional development oversight team is scheduled to review all aspects of key action step #1 in late December and early January.
- The initial training of the core team for Project Dream Catcher was completed in October 2018. The team consists of two special education teachers and both of the American Indian Education staff for the district. As a result of the initial training, the Dream Catcher team has developed and implemented district-wide processes to ensure the American Indian Education staff are alerted and provided the opportunity to participate in early intervention activities concerning our American Indian students. This active participation by the American Indian Education staff will assist in two fundamental ways. First, through their early intervention and active participation with intervention teams, the American Indian staff will be able to assist the school intervention teams to be aware of possible cultural influences which may be contributing to an individual student's situation. Second, because of the American Indian Education staff's connection to the students and their families, it is hoped that they will be able to identify and bridge any communication and support gaps between the school district and the family. It is anticipated that these additional culturally sensitive supports and communications will increase the effectiveness of the interventions and thereby positively impact student success.
- In October of 2018, the school board approved the funding to increase the staffing levels of the American Indian Education program from a .5 FTE to a full 2.0 FTE program dedicated exclusively to address the cultural, social, academic, and behavioral needs of our American Indian students. As of October 2018, both of the positions have been filled and the staff have been actively meeting the needs of students, including participation in student intervention meetings, and special education processes.

May 2019 Update on Strategy #2:

- The district's professional development oversight team reviewed all aspects of key action step #1 in early January 2019. Partially as a result of this work, the following outcomes have been achieved.
 - A re-designed Staff Development Advisory Committee is incorporating cultural diversity training into the district's back to school agenda for August 2019. Part of the professional development training will be provided by Minnesota Department of Education - American Indian Education staff. This initial training will be available to all district staff. A follow-up training on cultural diversity is also being planned for November 2019.
 - For the 2019-2020 school year, the district will be offering new professional development opportunities for any licensed staff through a Network Improvement Community (NIC). The NIC will focus on Closing the Achievement Gap through the use of culturally responsive teaching and positive behavior systems. The course topics will include:
 - Culturally responsive, positive behavior intervention and supports.
 - Alternatives to suspension.
 - Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies.
 - Culturally responsive Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) resources.

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The goals and outcomes for this professional development will include analyzing district data based on academic achievement and behavioral consequences; identify best practices for alternatives to suspension; and identify culturally responsive teaching strategies.

- For the 2019-2020 school year, the district will be offering revised professional development opportunities for any licensed staff through a Teacher Academy Class. The professional development class will focus on culturally responsive teaching methodologies. The course objectives will include:
 - Recognizing that culture is something that everyone has.
 - Actively engage multiple perspectives.
 - Connect the Head with the Heart with the Hands for Healing.
 - Validate and Affirm, Build and Bridge cultural differences (VABB).

The goals and outcomes for this professional development are to raise cultural awareness, increase cultural knowledge, and integrate culturally responsive classroom management.

- For the 2019-2020 school year, the Crossroads School will be focusing their professional development on Restorative Justice practices. This PLC Study Group will support building and district goals by addressing student behavior. Interactions that focus on democracy, fairness, consistency, respect, and trustworthiness will encourage students to remain at school and in class in the face of conflicts and crisis. Increased class time will directly affect our school academic goals as students who are engaged and in the classroom are learning at a higher rate. Crossroads staff will work with Anoka County mediation services to gain vocabulary, knowledge and skills in the areas of:
 - Circles to repair harm
 - Circles of support
 - Communication planning circles
 - Community building circles
 - Restorative conferencing

These skills will allow staff to build positive relationships with student who can be exceptionally challenging.

- In March of 2019, approximately 50 staff participated in training provided by the Project Dreamcatcher staff from the Minnesota Department of Education. The primary focus was to raise awareness of the current cultural challenges for the Native American people. This professional development also gave the historical perspective and insight into the tribal cultures.

September 2020 Update on Strategy #2:

While attempting to redesign instructional delivery models for the beginning of the school year during a pandemic and severe staff shortages, many of the plans for professional development were delayed. Instead of the original plan, the teaching staff and administration focussed on trying to identify student needs related

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to many of the following categories:

- Social and emotional supports for students during distance learning
- Technology needs and addressing discrepancies based on financial situations of individual families
- Physical health and well-being of student and families
- Assigning support staff to virtually assist many of our unique learners, while also solving the technology gaps and disparities between staff members.
- Coordinating the work of social workers, school therapists, school psychologists, mental health therapists and others to meet the needs of students.

Strategy #3: Develop and implement a district-wide system for reporting all student discipline issues.

In order for the district to understand and recognize patterns and tendencies with regard to all student discipline, the district must develop a stronger and more organized system of reporting data. Current practices have demonstrated inconsistent definitions and understanding (and therefore inconsistent application) of standards, policies and procedures. Once the district adopts consistent, effective and reliable student discipline practices and reporting procedures, we will then be able to effectively measure and analyze our trends and patterns of student discipline. At that point, the district will then have the capacity to build awareness within and across all of the schools and programs concerning discipline practices with all student groups.

Key Action Steps:

- By November 1, 2018 the superintendent will assign an administrative team to develop and implement a district-wide system of both consistent application and accurate reporting of disciplinary actions. Components of this district system will include:
 - Uniform language and definitions to categorize student discipline issues
 - Partial day dismissals (definitions, reasons/issues, outcomes, etc.)
 - In-school and out of school suspensions
 - Expulsions and exclusions at each site
 - A process for the district to review and analyze the data

The assigned administrative team will complete this task by incorporating input from a variety of district workgroups and committees. This work is to be completed and a final product presented to the superintendent for approval by May 1, 2019.

- Upon completion and approval of the final product, the assigned administrative team will then provide professional development for all building administrators on the updated tracking system and appropriate/consistent application of discipline procedures. Target date for completion of this step is July 30, 2019.
- Each Principal/Program Supervisor will be responsible for the training of their staff members on the implementation and reporting of discipline procedures with fidelity.

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Target date for the completion of this step is September 30 2019.

December 2018 Update on Strategy #3:

The district has been successful in implementing changes to its data reporting and data tracking systems. This part of the process is a crucial first step in being able to complete many other elements of Strategy #3. Before we can have our administrative teams review and reflect upon the district's disciplinary data, we first needed to be able to consistently and accurately record and report the data. This is now being accomplished through the use of the Alpine data tracking system. All building administrators have been trained on the use and capabilities of the Alpine data system. For this entire school year, all administrators have been using Alpine to record a wide variety of student data, including behavior and discipline data.

May 2019 Update on Strategy #3:

The processes of data management and retrieval necessary to effectively implement this strategy continue to be a challenge. Implementation continues to be hindered by technical/system issues. This issue is currently being addressed in problem solving work groups. More progress is expected in this area during the summer months, in preparation for the 2019-2020 school year.

September 2020 Update on Strategy #3:

Data management and retrieval continues to be a very challenging issue for the district. Our 18 month journey to transition to Alpine for better control of our data went well. Unfortunately, Alpine was acquired by another data company so our work needed to transitioned to the new vendor. This delay cost us several months of work which is still not completed.

The district recently completed a technology audit to further assess our challenges and a path to move forward. This area continues to be addressed, and it continues to be a major concern.

Strategy #4: Establish a Student Discipline Data Review Committee to review the outcomes of all disciplinary incidents which result in a suspension of a student. The intent of the committee is to provide information to the superintendent concerning all student suspensions. This committee will also be primarily responsible for the successful implementation of all aspects of the St. Francis Area Schools/MDHR Strategic Discipline Plan.

Similar to the Restraint/Seclusion Review Committee, this committee will be charged with analyzing suspension/expulsion data on a district-wide basis. Their mission is to review all discipline data from a systemic perspective. The committee will look for trends in the data and report its findings and recommendations for corrective action to the superintendent on a quarterly basis. The work of this

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committee is only to report findings to the superintendent (or designee) and not to engage in performance discussions with any specific staff member or site team.

Key Action Steps:

- The District-wide Administration Discipline Assessment Team will
 - review and analyze quarterly suspension data
 - review reports from School Leadership Teams (when applicable)
 - engage in PLC discussions around suspension data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and disability
 - Make specific system recommendations to the superintendent which the committee feels will improve outcomes for students by decreasing suspensions for all students.
- Review DIRS reporting process and discuss subjectivity/objectivity of DIRS categories that lead to suspension, including bullying, cyber bullying, harassment, disruptive/disrespectful behavior, insubordination, threats, intimidation and "other acts". Submit system modification/improvement recommendations to the superintendent at the end of each review cycle.
- Be responsible for the semi-annual reports to MDHR.
- On a semi-annual basis during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, report to the school board their progress on implementing this Discipline Strategic Plan and the outcomes resulting from its implementation.

December 2018 Update on Strategy #4:

In order to fully implement Strategy #4, the district needs to first solidify the infrastructure portions of Strategy #3. More work needs to be finalized in Strategy #3 at this time. Initial discussions have been held and decisions have been made to expand the work and membership of the Restraint and Seclusion Committee to incorporate the discipline, suspension and expulsion data review process. At the next scheduled committee meeting in January, more discussion and planning will be on the agenda.

May 2019 Update on Strategy #4:

As previously stated in Strategy #3, the district is continuing to problem-solve the technical issues associated with data collection, dissemination and analysis. Implementation continues to be hindered by technical/system issues. This issue is currently being addressed in problem solving work groups. More progress is expected in this area during the summer months, in preparation for the 2019-2020 school year.

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September 2020 Update on Strategy #4:

As previously stated in Strategy #3, the district is continuing to problem-solve the technical issues associated with data collection, dissemination and analysis. Implementation continues to be hindered by technical/system issues. This issue is currently being addressed in problem solving work groups and a technology audit by an outside consulting firm. More progress is expected in this area during the summer months, in preparation for the 2021-2022 school year.

Strategy #5: Revise the educational service delivery system for the students who reside at the BarNone Residential Treatment Center to better address the unique social/emotional as well as the educational needs of the students served.

The revised educational system and school services will be better aligned to meet the social/emotional needs of the students. This revision and improvement in educational programming will result in a more therapeutic and developmentally appropriate response to student behavior and it is anticipated it will reduce suspensions and exclusions of both students of color and students with disabilities.

Key Action Steps: (Note....All of the following strategies are planned to be implemented during the 2018-19 school year.)

- The school district will partner with the staff of the BarNone Treatment Center to develop a coordinated therapeutic approach to work with the students throughout their school day. This will include the facilitation of therapy groups by the treatment center therapists at scheduled intervals during the school day.
- In conjunction with the Minnesota Department of Education, the district will apply for a change in location of the current school to the BarNone campus.
- The BarNone and the school staff will meet on a regular basis throughout the school year to discuss and coordinate strategies to assist all students to be more successful in their treatment program and their education.
- The school district staff of Crossroads School will be given the opportunity to use their paid professional development time to study and develop new student behavior/discipline strategies which will reduce the number of suspensions from school.

December 2018 Update on Strategy #5:

The district has been able to make great strides in the implementation of Strategy #5. As a result, the district

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has experienced a dramatic drop in suspensions for this group of students. A more specific data set will be shared during the next progress report. Specific progress on each of the key action steps is as follows:

- The school district is actively partnering with the staff of the BarNone Treatment Center to implement a coordinated therapeutic approach in working with the students throughout their school day. This now includes the facilitation of therapy groups by the treatment center therapists at scheduled intervals during the school day. This activity more closely meets the emotional needs of the students and helps to keep them regulated throughout the school day, thus reducing the likelihood of escalated behaviors resulting in disciplinary action.
- In conjunction with the Minnesota Department of Education, the district applied for and received permission for a change in location of the current school to the BarNone campus. This change is anticipated to improve the students' ability to access their education on a more consistent basis in an environment that is more supportive of their social/emotional needs.
- The BarNone and the school staff meet on a regular basis throughout the school year to to discuss and coordinate strategies to assist all students to be more successful in their treatment program and their education.
- The school district staff of Crossroads School will be given the opportunity to use their paid professional development time to study and develop new student behavior/discipline strategies which will reduce the number of suspensions from school.

May 2019 Update on Strategy #5:

Strategy #5 has been fully and successfully implemented. The district and the treatment center will continue to fully partner in their work to provide a comprehensive education to all students and minimize suspensions and missed instruction.

September 2020 Update on Strategy #5:

Strategy #5 has been fully and successfully implemented. The district and the treatment center will continue to fully partner in their work to provide a comprehensive education to all students and minimize suspensions and missed instruction.

Strategy #6: Revise the district's Student Handbooks regarding discipline, student rights and responsibilities. The update of the Student Handbooks will be consistent with a revised and adopted School Board Policy 406.

Once the school district's policies and procedures concerning student discipline have been reviewed, updated and have consistent application across all student groups, the next step will be the improved communication of policies and procedures. The objective is to establish a system of communicating critical information to all parents and students from a district-level document, rather than individual building communications. This will build consistent messaging and implementation for all student groups.

Key Action Steps:

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- By February 1 2019, the superintendent will form a revision committee which will include representatives from district elementary and secondary schools and programs, special education staff, the Indian Education Coordinator, district alternative learning programs, and district administrators.
- Throughout it's work this committee will seek input from a variety of stakeholders which includes students and families, AIPAC, SEAC, Middle School and High School student groups, Parent-Teacher Associations, and other groups as determined by the committee.
- The revision committee will make appropriate revisions to the handbook, both in format and content.
- Upon completion, the revised handbook will be submitted to the superintendent for review and approval by the school board.

December 2018 Update on Strategy #6:

The district has not yet started to work on Strategy #6.

May 2019 Update on Strategy #6:

With the recent completion of Policy 406 - Student Discipline, the district is now planning to implement the action steps of Strategy #6.

September 2020 Update on Strategy #6:

The implementation of this strategy has been delayed due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The district is utilizing every resource available to simply manage the day to day operations of the school year and to successfully educate students and care for their mental health concerns as best as possible. The implementation of Policy 406 will be addressed during the 2021-22 school year.

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