

ACCESS

Achieving Community Connections & Educational Supports for Students *An Alternative to Expulsion in School Discipline Matters*

Introduction:

The ACCESS program is an alternative to the expulsion hearing process designed to address student behavior that leads to discipline by targeting the underlying causes of that behavior. It also incorporates restorative justice principles in the investigation and resolution of incidents by focusing on repairing harm instead of relying on exclusion from school.

Students, parents and schools will agree to use ACCESS to resolve problematic behavior instead of following the expulsion procedures provided in the Education Code. The ACCESS process will be available for behaviors that do not require mandatory expulsions under state and federal law.

While the ACCESS program is intended for students who would otherwise be referred for expulsion, alternative discipline methods (such as restorative justice and PBIS) should continue to be employed to address behaviors before they reach the point of an expulsion referral.

Pre-Implementation

1) School Staff and Community Training

It is vital for school staff, students, and parents to learn about any alternative prior to implementation. Expectations must be established on all levels so that students and parents learn what resources are available to them through ACCESS. Teachers and administrators must also receive training about ACCESS to learn that school exclusion will not be the response to student behavior.

2) Develop School District Resources

ACCESS revolves around providing students and parents with the support they need to address the underlying causes of behavior. School districts will need to either create in-house expertise or rely on community partners to provide students with services required by ACCESS. If community partners are utilized by the school district, the agreements should require providers to proactively engage the student and family instead of placing the burden on them to initiate the contact with the provider.

3) Baseline Data Collecting

In order to measure how successful ACCESS is in reducing expulsions and involuntary transfers, school districts should collect expulsion and involuntary transfer data for the five years preceding the first year of implementation. The data should account for identifying factors (Race, Gender, ELL, Reduced Lunch, Special Education, etc.) as well as

grounds of expulsion and previous discipline history. Discipline data should be discussed on a regular basis among teachers and administrators, and data should be shared among all stakeholders for transparency purposes.

The Process

1) Referral to ACCESS

When a student has exhibited behavior that would ordinarily result in an expulsion referral, the district will be contacted within 24 hours.¹ The ACCESS Facilitator at the district will set up a meeting within 48 hours of the incident that led to the referral and confirm in writing that the student and parent are willing to participate in the ACCESS process.

2) Assessment of ACCESS Services

The ACCESS Facilitator will assign the student to an ACCESS Case Manager. The primary responsibility of the Case Manager is to conduct a thorough needs assessment for the student. The Case Manager will have access to student records, including attendance, academic performance and school discipline history. They will also interview the student, parent/guardian/caregiver, teachers and other supportive individuals for input into the assessment. The assessment should be completed within five days of the ACCESS referral.

3) Resolution of Incident

ACCESS will rely on restorative justice principles in the resolution of any incident. The determination of who should participate in the restorative process will be made by a Restorative Justice Coordinator (RJC) at the district level. Unlike current expulsion procedures that seek only to determine whether a student has committed an expellable offense, the RJC will work with the people affected by the incident to look at the harm caused by the incident and how to redress the harm. The RJC will facilitate a restorative circle and/or any other appropriate meeting with the students who were involved in the incident.

The RJC should invite other individuals involved, such as teachers or parents. The result of the meeting, if the student is found to have engaged in problematic behavior, will focus on accountability to classmates and the school, but it *will not* result in further exclusion from school. Law enforcement *will not* be involved in this process. The restorative justice process should be completed within one week of the incident.

4) Case Plan Development

¹ Pursuant to the California Education Code, the school district may continue to proceed with expulsion referrals for alleged misconduct which would require a mandatory expulsion. For all other alleged disciplinary infractions, it is the intention that the school district shall rely on ACCESS and make referrals to the program accordingly.

The ACCESS team, composed of the ACCESS Facilitator, Case Manager and RJC, will meet to develop a case plan creating a safe and stable educational placement for the student. The case plan will include an array of supportive services that the student will receive during the student's participation in the ACCESS program. The supportive services will be provided depending on need. A case plan may include: mental health services, substance abuse counseling, tutoring, mentorship, afterschool programs, parenting groups, and peer groups. Ideally, these services would be available within the district. These services could also be provided by community partners.

In every case, the first placement preference will be for the student to remain in the same classroom. The second preference would be for the student to move to a different classroom within the same school. The last option would be for the student to transfer to a different comprehensive public school. At each placement, the ACCESS team would determine which resources would be provided to the student and how regularly any providers will meet with the student. All information will be compiled together into a written case plan. The case plan will also include a proposed date of exit from the ACCESS program.

5) Case Plan Meeting with Student and Parent

The ACCESS team will meet with the student and parent to discuss the case plan. The student and parent will be able to provide input to the case plan, such as other services the student would like to receive, as well as discuss the placement preference options. The goal of this meeting is to obtain consensus around the case plan.

Because the ACCESS process is voluntary, the student and parent could at this point opt out and decide to proceed with an expulsion hearing and the accompanying due process protections under the Education Code. If this occurs, the district should still offer the student an educational placement, ideally according to the same preferences discussed above, pending the expulsion hearing.

6) Case Plan Implementation and Follow-up

The ACCESS Case Manager and service providers will meet with the parent and student within a few days after the case plan is finalized. Service providers will be responsible for affirmatively making connections with the student. The Case Manager will follow up with the service providers to make sure connections happen as quickly as possible. The Case Manager will have meetings with the student, parent, student's service providers, and teachers on at least a monthly basis. The meetings will focus on student progress with the plan and may lead to future meetings between the student, parents and Case Manager to adapt the case plan to better serve the student.

7) ACCESS Program Completion and Transition

When the student is scheduled to exit the ACCESS program, the ACCESS Facilitator will call a final team meeting. A summary of the original ACCESS assessment along with the ACCESS case plan will be provided to the student and parent/guardian/caregiver.

For every student exiting the program, the ACCESS team will identify a transition person at the school placement (such as a counselor) who will support the student going forward and help maintain the progress made during ACCESS participation.

Evaluation

ACCESS will track data mentioned in the Baseline Data Collection section, as well as information such as discipline referrals made by individual teachers. Data will also be collected and analyzed to see if the timelines for case assessment and incident investigation set out above are being met, information about what the most common services being provided are and whether they are successful, and the overall success rate of the program in decreasing behavior that leads to discipline. This information will be used to make ACCESS a more effective and successful program.