

# Preliminary Analysis of an Instructional Alternative to Exclusionary Discipline

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**Abstract:** Decades of research have shown that exclusionary discipline practices are not only ineffective for changing student behavior, they lead to worse social, behavioral, and academic outcomes for students. This article explores the findings from a pilot study of the Inclusive Skill-Building Learning Approach (ISLA), an instructional alternative to exclusionary discipline practices. The purposes of ISLA are to improve student social and behavioral problem-solving, teacher and administrator practices, and student-teacher relationships while also reducing lost instructional time for student excluded from their learning environment. Results from the pilot indicated that implementation of ISLA was associated with reductions in exclusionary discipline practices (Cohen's  $h$  effect sizes ranged from .06 to .18 across schools and outcomes), and a substantial decrease in instructional minutes lost (~ 92%). Educational staff also reported favorable impressions of the intervention. Practical and conceptual implications, limitations of this study, and directions for future research are further discussed.

Over the past 20 years, researchers have been demonstrating the widespread and direct negative impact of exclusionary discipline (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsion) on individual students, schools, and society (Skiba, 2014; Zabel, 1986). Despite the robust body of evidence pointing to the detrimental effects of exclusionary discipline, schools continue to become more reliant on these practices as a response to problematic student behavior (Losen, Ee, Hodson, & Martinez, 2015; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Zabel, 1986). Furthermore, the result of the overuse of exclusionary discipline is a cyclical series of removals which directly affects student educational experiences and has a rippling effect on the school systems and society (Dishion & Snyder, 2016).

## Negative Impact on Students

Often, exclusionary discipline amplifies the risk of negative outcomes for individual students (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013; Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). Researchers have found that students who experience exclusion for behavioral infractions are more likely to experience lower academic achievement (Arcia, 2006), further discipline involvement (Mendez, 2003), and future juvenile justice involvement (Fabelo et al., 2011). They are also more likely to be suspended in the future, retained, and/or drop out of school (Marchbanks et al., 2014).

There is substantial evidence that exclusionary discipline is administered more often to students from diverse backgrounds. Inequities based on race, disability status, gender, SES, academic achievement, and sexual orientation have been documented (Skiba, 2014). It has been suggested that the disproportionate use of these practices may be contributing significantly to the achievement gaps we see for these groups (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Moreover, inequitable

and ineffective consequences resulting in student removal results in collateral damage for the entire school community, as indicated by research noting low academic achievement and reports of school safety issues even among students who have never been suspended (American Psychological Academy, 2008).

## Negative Impact on Schools and Society

There is a common misconception that even though exclusionary discipline may not be effective for changing individual student behavior, removal of the student from the educational environment is necessary to improve the quality of education for other students (American Psychological Academy, 2008). This does not seem to be the case. Schools with high rates of exclusionary discipline have lower academic quality (Perry & Morris, 2014) and poorer school climates (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013) than schools with lower rates of exclusion. Teachers who overuse exclusionary discipline feel more emotionally exhausted and less efficacious in their ability to manage student behaviors (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). Students in classrooms where reactive exclusionary discipline practices are used frequently report that their school is more disorderly and unsafe than students in classrooms that use proactive approaches (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013).

The overuse of exclusionary discipline is such a large problem that the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health (2013) issued a policy statement outlining the severity of the issue and the call for increased use of preventive strategies and alternatives. The policy statement suggests that even though exclusion is widely used, it does not seem to be a viable option from an economic perspective. Society benefits from individuals who are educated and contributing citizens. Because exclusionary discipline

contributes to lower levels of academic achievement and higher levels of incarceration for youth, it is extremely costly (Marchbanks et al., 2014). In addition, incarceration and restrictive placements are much more costly than alternatives that result in less restrictive and intensive support (Christie, 2004).

### Current Typical Practice

Extensive research documents the detrimental effects of exclusionary discipline, particularly for already marginalized or at-risk students, and policy has reflected the need for a response. The 2001 No Child Left Behind regulations required schools to decrease use of suspension and expulsion, and the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act includes provisions for states and school districts to reduce the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices. In response, many schools and districts have implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a way to prevent and deter problem behaviors. A wealth of empirical research conducted over the last 20 years documents the positive effects of implementing PBIS on student academic and behavioral outcomes and organizational health. Specifically, PBIS has been associated with decreases in behavior referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010) and increases in academic achievement (McIntosh, Bennett, & Price, 2011), students' social and emotional competencies (Bradshaw et al., 2012), and school safety (Horner et al., 2009). With its emphasis on preventive strategies, such as teaching, modeling, and reinforcing appropriate behaviors rather than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding, PBIS provides multiple effective strategies for preventing the escalation of problem behaviors and for defining systems for effective classroom behavior management. PBIS is delivered through three tiers of support—universal, targeted, and intensive (Sugai, Horner, & Lewis, 2009; Tilly, 2008; Walker, Horner et al., 1996)—in which the universal prevention level targets all students to optimize academic and social functioning and prevent challenges. The targeted level focuses on the use of additional evidence-based practices for students who struggle but for whom highly individualized support is not necessary. The intensive level supports students with the most significant needs, often in a 1:1 format. The driving principle behind PBIS is that the provision of preventive support to all students occurs as a first step because it is most efficient and effective and it allows students with additional needs to be provided supports without the cost of screening systems, danger of misidentification, and stigma of labeling (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Walker et al., 1996).

Although PBIS provides distinct promise for reducing the use of exclusionary discipline and has

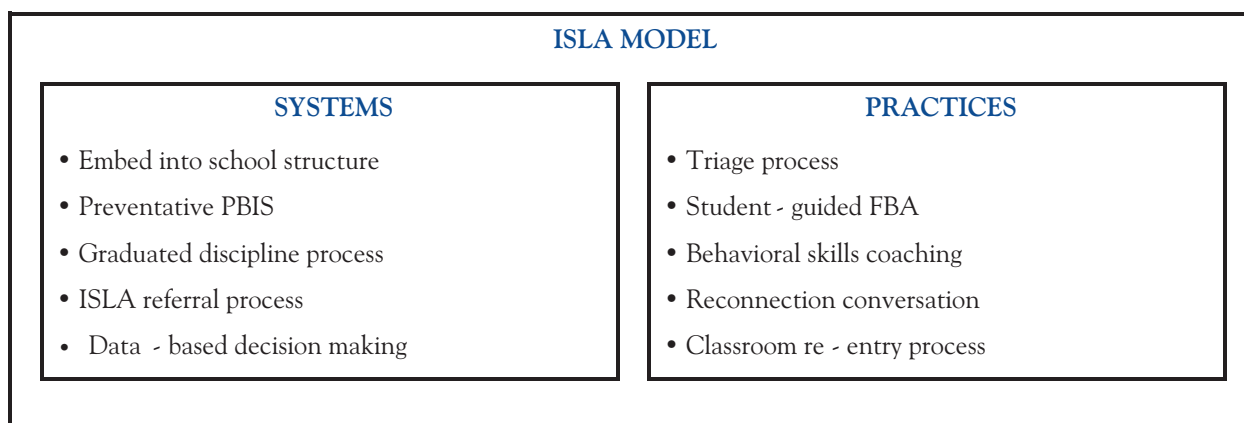
been associated with decreased discipline referral rates in secondary education (Flannery, Fenning, McGrath Kato, & McIntosh, 2014), there is still need for additional programs and systems within PBIS that specifically address the needs of students when they are sent out of class. Most typically in middle and high schools around the country, a student is sent out of class (or the cafeteria or the hallway) for a behavioral infraction. The student walks to the office, where that student waits for a prolonged period of time to meet with an administrator. The student then meets with the administrator and, as a consequence, is sent to a space within the school where the student cannot disrupt learning (nor can the student access it). This space is often shared with other students who violated a school rule. In this confined space, there is little to no support for lost instruction, appropriate classroom behaviors, ways to reconnect and make amends with the teacher, or the appropriate process for re-entering the classroom. This process offers no remediation for students or teachers, exacerbating academic deficiencies, problem behaviors, and recidivism rates (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

There are a few current practices targeting support for specific at-risk subgroups of students, including mentorship programs, policies that place students in behavior support classes, or behavior support programs (Christenson, Stout, & Pohl, 2012). Although some of these targeted interventions have been shown to have promise, they are designed to be implemented with only a small number of students already identified as at-risk of school failure (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Neild, 2009; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005), and they can require substantial school resources (staff time for student screening, implementation, and monitoring of student progress) or restructuring (pull-out classes). Targeted interventions such as these are also most successful when they are implemented in conjunction with a preventive PBIS system (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010).

In sum, PBIS is a theoretically sound foundation for classroom management, prevention, use of instruction, and function-based use of consequences. However, even with existing PBIS systems, there are still too many students (especially middle and high school students) who are removed from class, languish in disciplinary limbo even if they ultimately return to class, and/or end up suspended or expelled. Teachers, administrators, and students need alternatives to extended class removal that still allow (a) instruction to continue and (b) students to receive support that results in practical behavior change.

**Inclusive Skill-Building Learning Approach (ISLA)** The Inclusive Skill-Building Learning Approach (ISLA; Nese,

Figure 1. ISLA Two - Component Model



2016) is designed to improve student behavior, improve student-teacher relationships, and reduce exclusionary discipline practices and subsequent lost instructional time. This is accomplished through a two-component model: 1) systems to support implementation and 2) instructional practices to build student behavioral skills. Figure 1 clarifies the elements within each component, which are further discussed.

#### Systems to support implementation.

Intervention practices do not stand alone but need to be embedded in the organizational context of the school (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Therefore, implementing and sustaining ISLA requires that practices be connected to the school as a whole and have systems to support it. Further, PBIS uses a team to focus on articulating successful practices and systems through a review of data, alignment with current initiatives, and sharing and gathering feedback from the school staff and leaders (Sugai & Horner, 2009). These preventive models have been shown to be successful at improving students' academic achievement (McIntosh et al., 2011), social and emotional competencies (Bradshaw et al., 2012), and school safety (Horner et al., 2009) and in decreasing behavior referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Bradshaw et al., 2010). ISLA expands on the system of PBIS by providing training and support for all staff members on preventive strategies that are utilized across the school system, from the classroom to the front office, to minimize the use of exclusion, respond effectively to problem behaviors, and establish systematic processes to ensure that students are equitably supported through the discipline process.

To support implementation, ISLA uses preventive PBIS that is focused on achieving positive outcomes for all students and embeds all ISLA supports within existing practices within schools. Research has shown systems-level components need to be present for universal interventions to be implemented consistently

(Flannery et al., 2013), and ISLA is grounded in the PBIS framework, which has over 20 years of supporting research and practice. PBIS, implemented in over 20,000 schools across the country, provides a framework for schools to implement evidence-based interventions as they supply (a) systems needed for initial and sustained implementation, (b) guidance in the selection and implementation of practices that match the needs of the school, and (c) systems for using data to identify areas of concern and guide decision-making regarding interventions (Sugai & Horner, 2009). The use of these system-focused components decreases the need for intensive technical assistance, builds capacity within the school to increase fidelity of implementation, and increases the likelihood of sustainability (McIntosh et al., 2013).

As part of ISLA, all school staff are retrained on classroom behavior management strategies and a process of graduated discipline in an effort to reduce the number of students sent out of class. Graduated discipline systems reserve exclusionary discipline for the most serious behavior incidents, which can be operationally defined for educators. A system of discipline that is graduated ensures that less serious behavior incidents are met with milder responses rather than punitive consequences. Examples of graduated responses include reteaching and redirection, restitution, counseling, parent contact, and behavioral contracts. When behavior incidents are deemed too severe to be handled in the classroom, staff use a structured process to refer the students to the office. This process includes the completion of a behavior referral, the provision of an academic assignment on which the student receives support, and a phone call to inform guardians of the removal of the student from class.

**Instructional practices to build student behavior skills.** Social skills development is a critical component of interventions for youth with behavior problems

(Gresham, 2002; Gresham et al., 2004). Students who lack adequate social skills often have unsuccessful or negative peer relations and interactions with adults (Dishion et al., 1991; Dodge, 2000) and tend to spend time with other students who engage in problem behaviors (Dishion, Poulin, & Burraston, 2001; Dodge, 2000). Several research-based programs aimed at preventing behavior and conduct problems have included a behavioral-skill-building component (Botvin, 2000; Chamberlain, 2003; Gresham, 2002). One-on-one mentoring (in which an older peer or adult guides youth toward prosocial endeavors by direct instruction, modeling appropriate behavior, and serving as a confident and older advisor) is a common component of preventive interventions aimed at increasing youth skills and competencies. Previous researchers have shown that youth who have worked with mentors exhibit better outcomes than those youth who have not worked with mentors (Buchanan, Nese, & Clark, 2016; Philip & Hendry, 1996). Effective social skills coaching targets the development and refinement of positive adaptive behaviors and reinforcement of prosocial skill use (Gresham, 2002).

Within the ISLA intervention, students receive immediate coaching and support when they exhibit problem behavior that requires removal from the classroom environment. A five-step process, conducted by an educational support staff member (e.g., educational assistants, behavioral support staff), is utilized to provide students with behavioral support when they receive a behavior referral for problem behavior. The educational support staff member designated for behavior support conducts a student-guided functional behavioral assessment (FBA) to get a better understanding of the problem that occurred and the student's perception of what happened. The staff member then helps the

student identify an appropriate replacement behavior for the issue that occurred and practices the behavioral skill with the student until the student develops the behavioral skill needed to be successful in the classroom. In instances when damage was done, the staff member and the student complete a restitution plan to repair the damage. The staff member and the student then complete a guided Reconnection Conversation Card to be placed in the teacher's mailbox and rehearse the conversation to prepare the student for reentry into the classroom. Finally, the student is escorted back to class and supported through the Reconnection Conversation with the teacher. This process has been developed to provide immediate support to the student and to be time efficient, a contrast with current practices. A comparison of typical discipline practice to ISLA practices is shown in Figure 2.

#### Purpose Statement

The damaging impact of exclusionary discipline on the outcomes of students has been well documented in the literature, yet its overuse persists. The use of exclusionary discipline is often a result of school personnel lacking adequate supports and training to effectively address problem behaviors and students needing behavioral skills instruction to be successful in class. ISLA aims to address this gap in support by delivering a model that (a) focuses on teacher and administrator strategies for addressing problem behaviors in the classroom setting, (b) incorporates a systematic, graduated discipline process, (c) delivers instructional supports for students sent out of class, and (d) provides re-entry supports for transitioning students back to class in an efficient and restorative manner. Utilizing these four components has the potential to strengthen the use of classroom management practices, improve student behavior, improve student-teacher relationships, and reduce the

Figure 2. Comparison of Current Typical Discipline Practice to ISLA Practices

Current Typical Discipline Practice	ISLA Practice
1. Student engages in problem behavior	1. Student engages in problem behavior
2. Student sent to the principal's office	2. Student sent to the behavior support room
3. Student waits to receive consequence (e.g., detention, a call home, a talking to, ISS, OSS)	3. Student receives immediate behavioral support in the form of a student-guided FBA and targeted behavioral skills coaching.
4. Student receives consequence	4. Reconnection conversation is conducted to prepare the student for a return to the classroom environment.
5. Student sent back to class or removed from the school environment	5. Student is escorted back to class and support is provided to restore the relationship with the classroom teacher



use of exclusionary discipline and lost instructional time for students at risk of school failure.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the ISLA model during a pilot implementation year in two middle schools. Mixed methods data were collected on the use of exclusion; the amount of instructional time lost for students sent out of class; and staff member perceptions of the intervention, its effectiveness at reducing problem behaviors and improving student skills, and its fit within the school culture.

## Method

### Participants and Settings

Two public middle schools in the Pacific Northwest that serve students in Grade 6 through Grade 8 participated in this pilot study. School 1 is located in a suburban community and had an enrollment of 604 students during the 2015–16 school year. Approximately 85% of the students in School 1 qualified for Free and/or Reduced Lunch, 43% of the students identified as Students of Color, and the school received Title I supports. School 2 is located in a rural community and had an enrollment of 530 students during the 2015–16 school year. Approximately 68% of the students in School 2 qualified for Free and/or Reduced Lunch, 15% of the students identified as Students of Color, and the school did not receive Title I supports. Both schools had been implementing PBIS for a minimum of two years prior to training and implementation on ISLA and had identified the reduction of exclusionary discipline as one of their priorities for the following school year.

### Data Collection Procedures

Multiple sources of data were collected during the ISLA study to examine the extent to which the intervention (a) was related to a reduction in student problem behavior, (b) was related to a decrease in instructional minutes lost, (c) was delivered as intended, and (d) was perceived as a feasible and socially valid intervention.

**School-wide information system.** Data related to student problem behavior were collected from a web-based data collection system known as the School-Wide Information System (SWIS; May et al., 2013). To track incidences of problem behavior in the SWIS, schools entered office discipline referral (ODR) information as well as the type of exclusionary discipline practice taken (i.e., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion). For the purposes of this study, preintervention and postintervention data on major ODR counts and exclusionary discipline practices were collected and analyzed.

**Office discipline referrals.** SWIS categorizes ODR behavior infractions into two categories. Minor ODRs are nonserious, low-intensity behaviors such as defiance,

disruption, and inappropriate language (Todd, Horner, & Tobin, 2010). Major ODRs indicate student behavior that is more serious, dangerous, or intense than a minor behavior violation (Gion, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014). Major ODRs may include behavioral incidents such as physical aggression, fighting, and theft. For this study, only major ODRs were collected and analyzed.

**Exclusionary discipline practices.** Schools can track three types of exclusionary discipline practices in SWIS: (a) in-school suspension (ISS), (b) out-of-school suspension (OSS), and (c) expulsion. Time in ISS is a consequence that typically involves removing students from the instructional setting but providing them with an instructive, structured environment on school grounds. OSS is often used in response to a serious problem behavior. The American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on School Health (2013) recommends that OSS be reserved for situations that include the risk of real and perceived threats to the safety of the student or others. Expulsion is the most severe form of exclusionary discipline and is used less frequently than ISS and OSS.

**Instructional minutes lost.** The sum of minutes of instructional time lost was tracked across all students sent out of class each week. Instructional time lost included any time lost due to out-of-class behavior referrals, regardless of whether they resulted in an OSS, ISS, or detention. To collect data on lost instructional time, a secure Google Docs electronic tracking document where students were tracked from the time the out-of-class behavior referral was written until the time they returned to class was provided to each building.

**Staff survey.** Every staff member who utilized the ISLA room during the study was asked to complete a survey designed to measure the feasibility and social validity of the intervention. The lead author adapted the Primary Intervention Rating Scale: Teacher Version (PIRS; Lane, Robertson, & Wehby, 2002), a brief, individual-completed rating scale designed to assess social validity of universal interventions. The PIRS contained 17 questions on a six-point Likert scale, with 1 representing Strongly Disagree through 6 representing Strongly Agree. Lane and colleagues' (2009) examination of the reliability and structural validity of PIRS scores indicated that the PIRS is a one-factor instrument explaining approximately 70% of the variance at each school level (elementary, middle, and high) with strong internal consistency estimates of .97 (elementary), .98 (middle), and .97 (high).

**Staff focus group.** School staff members were asked to participate in a focus group to collect qualitative data regarding the perception of the effectiveness and feasibility of the ISLA intervention after implementation

was complete. Seven staff members at School 2 participated in the focus group that was facilitated by the lead author, including the ISLA facilitator, one 6th-grade math and science teacher, one 6th-grade language arts teacher, one 6th-grade physical education teacher, one 7th- and one 8th-grade science teacher, one 8th-grade math teacher, and one building-level administrator. During the focus group, staff members were asked a variety of questions, including (a) the perceptions of ISS and OSS prior to implementing the ISLA intervention, (b) the extent to which the students who received OSS or other exclusionary disciplinary practices prior to the intervention had improved their behavior, (c) the extent to which staff members perceived students as receiving the five core components of the ISLA intervention, (d) the core component that was perceived as most effective, (e) the skills or knowledge that students had learned as a result of the intervention, (f) suggestions for improvement and increased efficiency of the ISLA intervention, (g) how the ISLA ISS data were being used to target more intensive supports for students with recurring behavior infractions, and (h) general overall impressions of the successes associated with the ISLA intervention. The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed and is summarized anonymously.

#### Intervention Fidelity and Interobserver Agreement

To determine the extent to which the ISLA intervention was delivered as intended, fidelity of ISLA implementation data were collected via direct observation. The ISLA Curriculum Observation Fidelity Tool was developed by the lead author to measure the extent to which students in ISS were receiving the five core components of the intervention, including: (a) student-guided function-based assessment (FBA), (b) behavioral skills coaching, (c) reconnection conversation practice, (d) reconnection card development, and (e) classroom reentry support. Three graduate students were trained to collect data during 30-minute observation sessions. When one of the components of the intervention was observed, that component was coded as “delivered.” An average percentage of fidelity was calculated for each component by dividing the number of occasions a component was delivered by the total number of possible opportunities to deliver the component, multiplied by 100. Across the two schools, mean fidelity for student-guided FBA was 100%, Behavioral Skills Coaching was 88.9%, Reconnection Conversation Practice was 77.8%, Reconnection Conversation Card was 77.8%, and Classroom Reentry Support was 66.7%. Additionally, interobserver agreement data (IOA) were collected on 40% of 42 total observation sessions, whereby two trained observers would independently code the sessions and then data were compared to determine if agreement

was established across each of the five components. IOA remained above the 80% criteria for each component throughout the duration of the study, with 89% total agreement on implementation at School 1 and 98% total agreement on implementation at School 2.

#### Procedures

**Training on effective classroom management.** Before the start of the 2015–2016 school year, the lead author, district PBIS coach, and PBIS team at each middle school provided a training on classroom behavior management strategies to the entire staff. Classroom-managed versus office-managed problem behaviors were clarified, including the graduated discipline system developed by the PBIS teams, and group consensus was gathered on reserving exclusion for only the most serious of behavior incidents. For instances in need of exclusion, staff members were trained on how to utilize cross-class time-outs (a maximum of 15 minutes, in the classroom directly across the hall, and students needed to be sent with an academic assignment to work on), and the appropriate process for sending students to the office (with a behavior referral, an academic assignment, and a phone call to inform guardians).

**Training on ISLA.** School staff were also informed about the ISLA process, the supports students would be receiving if they were sent out of class, and what they should expect when students transition back to class (reconnection conversation, reconnection card, how to engage in the reconnection with students). In addition, the lead author provided two trainings (one initial training in August and one follow-up refresher in January) on the ISLA intervention to the ISLA facilitator assigned to the ISS room and the building administrators. They were trained on the triage process for when students arrive to the office, as well as the critical steps of the student-guided FBA, behavioral skills coaching, reconnection conversation and reconnection card, and the classroom reentry process.

#### Data Analyses

Descriptive results were analyzed preintervention and postintervention for students who received major office discipline referrals (e.g., for more serious behavioral incidents such as physical aggression, fighting, and theft) and exclusionary discipline practices (OSS, ISS, expulsion) during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years. To facilitate the interpretations of the results, we report Cohen's  $h$  (1988), an effect size statistic for pre/post ISLA comparison of proportions of the following outcomes: OSS, ISS, ODR, and expulsion. Effect size estimates are a simple and robust way of quantifying group or pre/post differences, allowing the magnitude of the difference and its practical significance to be more readily understood.

Additionally, data were collected at both schools to assess the amount of instructional minutes lost due to exclusionary discipline pre/post ISLA intervention. Data were also collected on staff social validity ratings of the ISLA intervention via the PIRS, and comments from a one-hour staff focus group were gathered at School 2 to identify how staff perceived implementation of the ISLA intervention.

**Results**  
**Office Discipline Referrals**

During the 2014–15 school year, School 1 reported a total of 616 major ODRs (an average rate of 2.9 per day), and 34% ( $n = 206$ ) of 613 students received at least one ODR. During the 2015–16 school year in which the ISLA intervention was implemented, School 1 reported a total of 462 major ODRs (an average of

2.14 per day), and 25% ( $n = 206$ ) of students received at least one ODR.

During the 2014–15 school year, School 2 reported a total of 414 major ODRs (an average rate of 1.92 per day), and 27% of students received at least one ODR. During the 2015–16 school year, School 2 reported a total of 322 major ODRs (an average of 1.5 per day), and 20% of students received at least one ODR.

Thus, pre/post ISLA implementation, total major ODRs decreased by 25% for School 1 and decreased by 22% for School 2. In addition, there was a 9% decrease in the percentage of students who received at least one ODR in School 1 and a 7% decrease in School 2, which are associated with effect sizes of  $h = .18$  and  $h = .15$ , respectively (Figure 3).

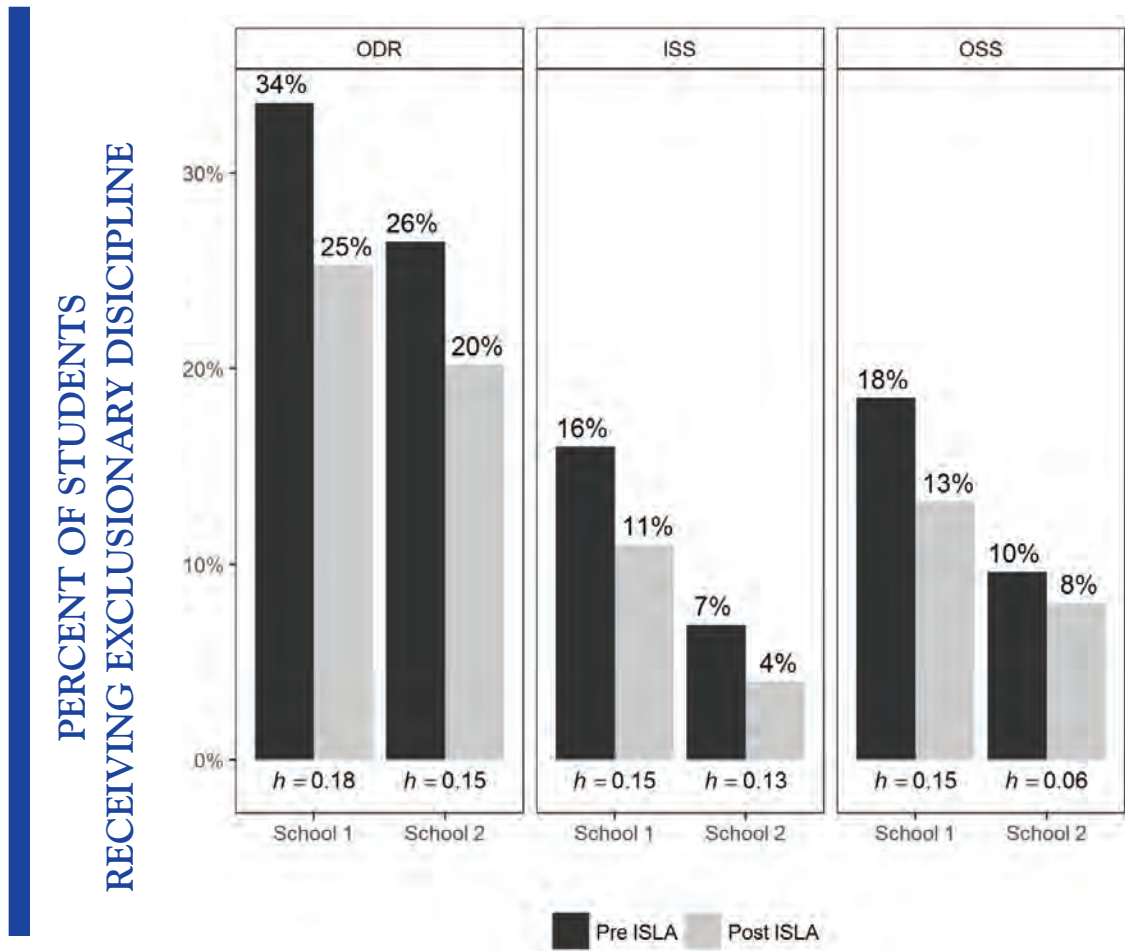


Figure 3. The percent of students in each of Schools 1 and 2 pre- and post-ISLA intervention who received out-of-school suspensions (OSS), in-school suspensions (ISS), and office discipline referrals (ODR). Below each pre-post ISLA paired bars in Cohen’s (1988)  $h$ , an effect size statistic for pre/post ISLA comparison or proportions of these outcomes (OSS, ISS, and ODR).

### Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Of the 613 students enrolled in School 1, 18.5% ( $n = 112$ ) received at least one OSS, 16% ( $n = 98$ ) received at least one ISS, and 1.1% ( $n = 7$ ) received expulsions in the 2014–15 school year (Figure 3). During the 2015–16 school year in which the ISLA intervention was implemented, of the 604 enrolled students in School 1, 13.2% ( $n = 80$ ) received at least one OSS, 11% ( $n = 65$ ) received at least one ISS, and 0.01% ( $n = 4$ ) received expulsions.

Of the 550 students enrolled in School 2 during the 2014-15 school year, 9.6% ( $n = 53$ ) received at least one OSS in the school year, 6.9% ( $n = 38$ ) received at least one ISS in the school year, and only one student (.002%) received an expulsion in 2014–2015 (Figure 3). During the 2015–16 school year in which the ISLA intervention was implemented, of the 530 enrolled students in School 2, 8% ( $n = 45$ ) received at least one OSS, 4% ( $n = 23$ ) received at least one ISS, and no student received an expulsion.

After the ISLA intervention, all outcomes showed a decrease in the percentage of students who received exclusionary discipline. The associated effect sizes for the decrease in ISS rates for School 1 was  $h = .15$  and

for School 2 was  $h = .13$  (Figure 3). The associated effect sizes for the decrease in OSS rates for Schools 1 and 2 was  $h = .15$  and  $h = .06$ , respectively (Figure 3). In School 1, three fewer students received expulsions from school (57% reduction) during ISLA implementation, an effect size of  $h = .14$ . In School 2, no expulsion statistics are reported because no student received an expulsion during ISLA implementation.

### Instructional Minutes Lost

Minutes of instructional time lost included any time lost due to out-of-class behavior referrals, regardless of whether the lost minutes resulted in disciplinary action. The sum of minutes of instructional time lost at School 1 prior to ISLA was 1,125 minutes. During the implementation of ISLA, the sum of instructional time lost was 75 minutes, a 93% reduction in minutes of lost instructional time compared to the previous year (Figure 4). This difference (1,050 minutes) amounted to more than two full days of school. The sum of instructional minutes lost at School 2 was 563 minutes prior to ISLA, and 45 minutes of lost instructional time following the ISLA intervention, a 92% reduction, and a difference (519 minutes) which represented more than a full day of school.

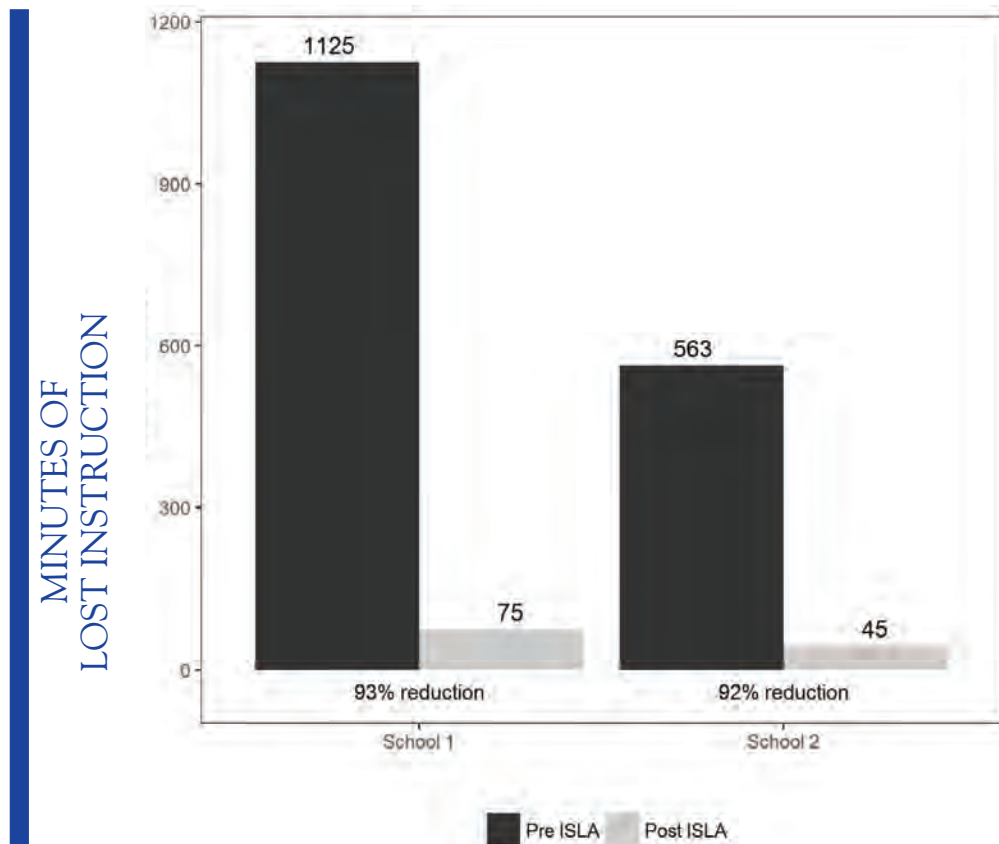


Figure 4. The number of minutes of lost instruction and the percent reduction in each of Schools 1 and 2 pre- and post-ISLA intervention.



### Staff Survey

A total of 10 staff members (teachers = 8, educational assistants = 2) completed the PIRS to measure the extent to which the ISLA intervention was perceived as being socially valid. The sample included respondents from both middle schools (40% from School 1 and 60% from School 2) with 30% of the responses identifying as male and 70% identifying as female. The average number

of years of teaching was 8.78 (range = 6 to 17 years). Overall, staff members rated the ISLA intervention favorably, with staff members indicating that ISLA was beneficial for their school, that they were willing to use ISLA, and that it was a feasible intervention to implement, among others. Mean scores for each item on the PIRS ranged from 4.89 to 5.70 and results are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive results of the social validity of the ISLA intervention.

<b>Item</b>	<b>N (% missing)</b>	<b>Mean (SD) Range</b>
1. This is an acceptable intervention for the middle school	10 (0)	5.60 (.52) 5-6
2. Most teachers find this intervention appropriate	10 (0)	5.40 (.52) 5-6
3. This intervention should prove effective in meeting the purposes	9 (10%)	5.44 (.53) 5-6
4. I would suggest the use of this intervention to other teachers	10 (0)	5.40 (.84) 4-6
5. The intervention is appropriate to meet the school's needs and mission	9 (10%)	5.44 (.73) 4-6
6. Most teachers find this intervention suitable for the described purposes and missions	9 (10%)	5.22 (.67) 4-6
7. I am willing to use this intervention in the school setting	10 (0)	5.70 (.48) 5-6
8. This intervention does not result in negative side effects for the students	10 (0)	5.20 (.92) 4-6
9. This intervention is appropriate for a variety of students	10 (0)	5.50 (.53) 5-6
10. This intervention is consistent with those I have used in school settings	10 (0)	5.30 (1.06) 3-6
11. The intervention is a fair way to fulfill the intervention purposes	9 (10%)	5.33 (.71) 4-6
12. This intervention plan is reasonable to meet the stated purposes	9 (10%)	5.44 (.73) 4-6
13. I like the procedures used in this intervention	10 (0)	5.10 (.99) 3-6
14. This intervention is a good way to meet the specified purpose	9 (10%)	5.44 (.73) 4-6
15. The monitoring procedures are manageable	9 (10%)	5.22 (.83) 4-6
16. The monitoring procedures give the necessary information to evaluate this plan	9 (10%)	4.89 (1.17) 3-6
17. Overall, this intervention is beneficial for middle school students	10 (0)	5.50 (.71) 4-6

### Staff Focus Group

Data were analyzed from a 1-hour focus group with school staff members. The interview was conducted by the lead author to gain additional contextual information on staff perceptions' of ISLA and implementation of the intervention in middle school settings. Italics below represent emphases added. First, staff were asked to describe the process of student discipline used in the school prior to ISLA implementation. Following that discussion, staff members were asked to describe what they enjoyed about ISLA implementation, what was challenging, and the impact ISLA had on their relationships with students. Overall, staff members liked the ISLA intervention, felt that it helped facilitate the process of getting students back to class with needed prosocial skills, and enjoyed the reconnections they made with students through the process. They also expressed the need for more information about what skills the student was working on through the ISLA process so that they could encourage those skills in the classroom. Below are sample quotes related to their experiences pre/post ISLA implementation.

#### Pre-ISLA Implementation

I very rarely have ever kicked kids out of class because there was no place for them to go, no support for them, and it wasn't going to be a like a positive sort of experience.  
– 6th-grade math teacher

#### Post-ISLA Implementation

##### ISLA Student Supports/Skill Building

It's a better healthier, relationship with the student... – 6th-grade math/science teacher

What I appreciate about it [ISLA] the most is the fact that the kids don't lose their total self-esteem. It helps them build it and they know they can start over and do it the right way and they don't give up and that's what I appreciate the most about it.– ISLA facilitator

They come back with an apology so we can tell that [the ISLA facilitator] has, you know, worked with them and given them some ideas and even given them some perspective [on their behavior]. – 6th-grade PE teacher

But, the fact that kids are not going to the office, but are instead side stepping that...the stigma that is connected to the 'you have been sent to the principal' automatically puts up a defense with so many kids... and you need to

work for sometimes hours to break that down for a kid to open up enough to say, 'yeah I did screw up, I should have done it this way.' – Principal

#### Staff Communication

As the classroom teacher, I think, um, having this as an intervention has been very good...I just think it would be helpful for the classroom teachers to know, ok, um, student x has been down there, has been sent for this many times for these behaviors and, you know, that way, in class, if or when, in class, I can maybe tap into what did you learn when you were with [ISLA facilitator], that kind of thing and try to stop it before it gets to that point again. – 6th-grade language arts teacher

#### ISLA Room

It's a positive room when you walk in. I mean the name alone is a good thing. But you go in there and people are being talked to and worked with and nobody is ashamed.  
– 6th-grade math/science teacher

#### Discussion

Both schools showed meaningful pre/post decreases in ODRs and the use of exclusionary discipline practices. Greater decreases were observed in School 1, where the percent of students receiving ODRs decreased by 9%, the percent of students receiving ISS and OSS decreased by about 5%, and expulsions decreased by 57%. The reduction in ODRs was associated with an effect size of .18, and each of ISS and OSS reductions were associated with an effect size of .15. In School 2, the percent of students receiving ODRs decreased by 7%, ISS decreased by 3%, OSS decreased by 1%, and expulsions were reduced from one to zero. Thus, both schools demonstrated decreases in the use of exclusion, although in different magnitudes; however, it is worth noting that the effect sizes associated with the reductions in proportions of ODRs and ISS were similar across schools, and the magnitude of those reductions represent meaningful and promising changes. These consistencies are particularly important, as the ISLA intervention specifically offers a n i nstruational alternative to in-school suspensions, creating a pathway toward increased school-wide restorative practices and decreased instructional minutes lost. The oft-cited rule-of-thumb offered by Cohen (1988) for interpreting the magnitude of effect sizes classifies  $h = .20$  as a small difference,  $h = .50$  as medium, and  $h = .80$  as large.

However, Cohen (p. 184) also advised to avoid the use of these conventions in favor of values provided by theory or experience in the specific area. In education, effect sizes of .50 are rarely observed, and research has reported average effect sizes of .10 (SD = 0.33) for whole-school treatments (Lipsey et al., 2012), indicating that the ODR and ISS effect sizes reported here demonstrate that ISLA has the potential to be an effective school-wide intervention.

In addition to the aforementioned similarity across schools observed for ISS effect sizes, both schools showed a pre/post ISLA reduction in ODRs of approximately 22% to 25% and a pre/post ISLA reduction in minutes of lost instruction of about 92%. Of course, causation cannot be inferred; however, some study limitations (e.g., cohort effect) might be mitigated by the observation of consistent and appreciable decreases in ISS, ODRs, and lost instructional time, all of which represent the potential for considerable benefit to schools.

### Limitations and Future Research

Several important limitations need to be considered when interpreting the findings and considering next steps for research. First, given this study was based on a limited sample of schools within one Northwestern state, results cannot be generalized to all schools. Both participating schools had limited racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity and are not representative of other regions across the United States. Further research from other regions and schools serving more diverse populations of students is needed to confirm these findings and further elaborate on needed services.

A second limitation is that the design of the study was correlational, did not contain a control group, and participants were not randomized. Thus, causal inferences cannot be drawn. The use of quasi-experimental and randomized control group designs will strengthen the conclusions that can be made when examining the impact of instructional alternative to exclusionary discipline practices.

A third limitation is the absence of fidelity data collected on the ISLA coaching sessions provided to the school staff, building administrators, and the ISLA facilitators. Although these sessions were delivered by the first author, the absence of fidelity data on how the coaching sessions were conducted prevents us from ensuring that both schools received the same information and that all components were covered. Future studies on ISLA implementation will benefit from the measurement of coaching fidelity, as standardization across coaching supports provided to different schools is important for both documenting the success of the intervention as well as the generalizability of findings. Additionally, it should be noted that this study employed

a traditional method for training and coaching, whereby the first author provided these supports in person to both schools. Research examining different modalities for training (e.g., tele-coaching, train-the-trainer models) would add to the feasibility of implementing ISLA in different communities, including rural and remote settings, and districts where multiple schools are trained at a time.

Finally, student feedback on the ISLA intervention was not collected during the pilot study. Student voice and buy-in are critical for implementation success and the sustainability of practices over time, especially in middle and high school where students are more involved in shaping their school climate. Future research on the efficacy of this intervention would benefit from an iterative approach that takes multiple stakeholder viewpoints into consideration.

### Conclusion

Exclusionary discipline practices have long been used as responses to unwanted student behaviors. The findings from this pilot study suggest the ISLA intervention may be an effective tool for reducing out-of-school suspension, in-school suspensions, and expulsions. Initial impressions of the intervention's feasibility and usability were favorable. Given the exploratory nature of this study, future research and practice should focus on refining the intervention, employing quasi-experimental and experimental designs, and promoting generalization to schools.

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