



# School Diversion Programs: Can They Reduce the Risk Factor Influences for Youth in Educational Facilities?

Juvenile Justice Certificate Capstone 2025

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## Topical Introduction

*"The "school-to prison pipeline" (American Civil Liberties Union, 2012) has been a topic amongst policymakers, educational professionals, and the Juvenile Justice Administration for decades. The early onset of juvenile delinquency can be forecasted by the handling of youth with behavioral and learning difficulties within educational settings and facilities. Youth who are removed from daily attendance of school can be re-routed to choices and options of being penalized within the juvenile justice system. In 2009-2010, close to 2,000,000 middle school students across the U.S. were suspended during the academic school year. During years 1972-1973 and 2009-2010, the rate of suspension doubled for African American (11.8% to 24.3%) and Latino (6.1% to 12.0%) students, whereas rates increased only slightly for White students (6.0% to 7.1%) (Mizel et al, 2016)."*

Mizel, M. L., Miles, J., Pedersen, E. R., Tucker, J. S., Ewing, B. A., & D'Amico, E. J. (2016). To Educate or To Incarcerate: Factors in Disproportionality in School Discipline. Children and youth services review, 70, 102-111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.09.009>

## Executive Summary

School Diversion Programs can be outlined and tailored to minimize the number of academic suspensions within a calendar year. School districts can create a social emotional learning platform for student behavioral occurrences that can help to minimize the reoccurring negative behaviors with fighting, disruptive behaviors, expiatory language, and bullying. These behaviors have consequences of suspension due to code of conduct adherences and expectations. Social emotional learning or skill building could possibly help students in recognizing behaviors that interfere with their academic learning. For this project, I chose to work with Omaha Street School to help them assess if their school diversion program was making an impact. I began by reviewing the research on the problematic areas and

reviewing the research on the problematic areas and risks to adolescents that are removed from educational settings and facilities due to out-of- school placement. I hypothesized that once a youth is excluded from academic opportunity it increases the risk for them to become involved in multiple non-beneficial behaviors that can lead into juvenile delinquency. I proposed implementing a student survey with Omaha Street School youth modeled from the Monarch Room Study found in my research.

## Research

Results from the Monarch Room study reflect that having behavioral and trauma-informed programming onsite can decrease suspensions with students who struggle with behavioral problems. This mixed method study was orchestrated by Baroni et al., (2016) that took a deeper look into female juvenile court- involved youth that attended Monarch Room, a specialized trauma-informed alternative program, that is utilized in replace of traditional forms of suspension and disciplinary structures. The study projected a reduction in school suspension from those who participated with its services, however, no exact or specific identifiers with the Monarch Room utilization structure have been intricately examined. When emotions or behaviors disrupt the students' learning environment, to participate within the Monarch Room environment the individual can be referred by a school staff member or voluntarily attend its services.

The specialized Monarch Room treatment program shed light on the certainty of trauma and reactions on the behaviors of such students; those who respond by disciplinary measures that aren't commonly used over traditional provisions involving school discipline and consequences. The alternative intervention method is staffed with trained and knowledgeable contributors who assist students with de-escalation techniques and positive support and reinforcement. Some of these techniques include sensory puzzles, weighted blankets, fidget toys, stationary bicycles which help with stabilizing mood and emotions. Coping skills and self-soothing

mechanisms are introduced and incorporated alongside occupational therapy referrals when necessary. The specialized method to problem-solving of behaviors is thoroughly documented; reviewed to add to continual improvement of policies for school administrations. These unconventional methods were created to maintain and regulate intervention continuum.

Crosby, S. D., Gay, A. D., Somers, C., & Baroni, B. A. (2018). Avoiding school suspension: Assessment of a trauma-informed intervention with court-involved, female students. Preventing School Failures, 62(3), 229-237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2018.1431873>

## Diversion Process

The initial step to see if the student qualifies to participate in the Omaha Street School Diversion program is for the staff member to communicate with the school principal on the behavior infraction. The principal will review the Omaha Street School Handbook and then meet with the student and discuss the behavior infraction. The principal will then make the decision to allow the student to participate and schedule a meeting with the student and parent(s). During this meeting, the principal will communicate the expectations and confirm how many days the student will attend the Omaha Street School Diversion program. After the student completes their scheduled dates and curriculum there will be follow-up with the student in 90 days. The follow-up will consist of feedback from both the student and parent(s). The diversion program specialist will input feedback and data into database spreadsheet. At the end of each calendar school year, each student who participates will be monitored on their progress.

***'Four students that participated in Omaha Street School Diversion program during the 2023-2024 school year. Out of these four students: one graduated from school, two currently attend Omaha Street School, and one has not returned due to other personal factors. One of these students have completely changed their negative behaviors and hasn't been suspended from school for the 2024-2025 school year.'*** - Omaha Street School Executive Director, Linda Reimer.

## Proposed Solution



Omaha Street School is a private, alternative high school that focuses on a trauma-informed care approach within education. This 'Alternative to Suspension' concept of the Omaha Street School Diversion program was created to deal with the behavioral challenges leading into suspension and expulsion consequences. The executive staff and board of Omaha Street School wanted to work with students to provide a restorative/rehabilitative approach instead of out of school placement. The need was recognized to work with students as they navigate through their personal challenges and create skill-building initiatives. The goal of this project was to implement a youth survey to identify if this program was making an impact on suspension/expulsions from Omaha Street School. Utilizing the research, I developed a survey that will be administered to the youth at the school this summer.

## Challenges

Due to the limited existence of the Omaha Street School Diversion program, there wasn't enough conformable data to reflect the positivity of program standards over a length of time. The program requires a specialized employee that can administer social emotional learning material and collect data on the number of suspensions and/or behavior challenges and changes amongst the students. This role is currently vacant and will be revisited for the upcoming 2025-2026 school year. The survey from this project will assist in gathering qualitative feedback to support the need for further programming.