

**Report on Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention –  
Center for the Prevention of School Violence’s  
Alternatives to Short-term Suspension Research**

**prepared by**

**The Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention –  
Center for the Prevention of School Violence**

**December 2002**

## **Executive Summary**

In Spring, 2002, the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention – Center for the Prevention of School Violence (DJJDP - Center) conducted a survey of North Carolina's 117 local educational agencies (LEAs) to determine the existence of alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. This research was prompted by a concern about this type of suspension as well as uneasiness number the amount of these suspensions. This led North Carolina's General Assembly in 2001 to pass legislation (Senate Bill 71) designed to explore alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension in the hopes of creating pilot programs for all school systems to consider.

DJJDP – Center conducted this research in three-parts: a telephone survey of all 117 LEAs utilizing various contacts in each LEA's central office; follow-up telephone interviews of LEAs indicating some type of alternative to out-of-school suspension programming; and site visits to various identified existing alternatives to out-of-school suspension programs. Findings obtained through the survey identified "snapshot" information regarding alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension; the findings reflected information obtained from one source at one point in time. Program information identified via the telephone survey was obtained from one person, usually located in the central office. An important point to make is that this one person may or may not have had complete information regarding programming at the building level in the LEA of interest.

Based on the telephone responses from the LEAs, fifty-nine LEAs identified no alternative to short-term suspension programming; nineteen LEAs cited programming with in-school suspension and alternative to short-term suspension components or alternative schools with alternatives to short-term suspension components; six LEAs highlighted targeted alternatives to short-term suspension programming; and thirty-three LEAs identified some type of alternative to short-term suspension programming. In each response category, LEAs were also divided into four regions: western; piedmont; central; and eastern.

Research conducted through the follow-up telephone interviews and program site visits allowed DJJDP – Center staff to analyze the focus area and type of collaboration, in addition to the geographic location and population served, of the thirty-three existing programs identified as alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. Of these programs identified by LEAs, six were academic based, eight were community-service based, and nineteen were counseling based. Collaboration of existing programs was based on the funding source: LEA; community; or combination of LEA and community. Three of the thirty-three programs were community - only funded, twelve were collaborations between the LEA and the community, and eighteen were LEA-only funded. Because of local funding issues, several programs in the western and eastern regions were not funded for the 2002-2003 school year.

Because of the number of LEAs identified through DJJDP – Center research offering no alternative to short-term out-of-school suspension, the Department of Public Instruction conducted additional research via a written survey of North Carolina's public schools. This survey in combination with DJJDP – Center research will allow for a greater understanding of the options available to short-term out-of-school suspended students.

## **Introduction**

In Spring, 2002, the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention – Center for the Prevention of School Violence (DJJDP - Center) conducted a survey of North Carolina's 117 local educational agencies (LEAs) to determine the existence of alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. This research was prompted by a concern about this type of suspension as well as a concern about the number of these suspensions. Every day in North Carolina students are suspended out of their schools. In 2000-2001 alone, 217,758 short-term suspensions involving 114,621 students took place with a resulting 650,000 lost instructional days. While responding to inappropriate behavior with such suspensions is not a new education practice, concern about the number of students being suspended, the consequences of the suspensions, and their effectiveness is growing. This concern prompted North Carolina's General Assembly in 2001 to pass legislation (Senate Bill 71) designed to explore alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension in the hopes of creating pilot programs for all school systems to consider.

As part of Senate Bill 71(SB71), DJJDP and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) were mandated to collaborate to identify school systems which have short-term suspension programs. The collaboration of the two departments evolved through several phases. During phase one, programs were jointly recruited by the departments through a call for proposals. This call resulted in the identification of two sites, located in Burke and Gaston counties, which meet almost all of the requirements of SB71. Teams from DPI and DJJDP visited these sites to carry out a program mapping process designed to identify gaps between the programs and SB71 requirements.

Phase two of SB71 involved a second call for proposals. No additional sites were generated from this call, however. The rigorous requirements of the legislation as well as the lack of funding associated with it were determined to be explanations for this lack of response. Coterminal with the second call for proposals was the research mentioned above involving the 117 school systems in North Carolina. DJJDP – Center conducted this research in order to identify existing alternatives to short-term suspension programs. This research was carried out in three-parts: a telephone survey of all 117 LEAs utilizing various contacts in each LEA's central office; follow-up telephone interviews of LEAs indicating some type of alternative to out-of-school suspension programming; and site visits to various identified existing alternatives to out-of-school suspension programs.

The following report contains the findings from the research conducted by DJJDP – Center. Findings based on the telephone survey, follow-up interviews, and program site visits are identified. Based on the telephone responses from the LEAs, four areas regarding existing programs are analyzed: LEAs with no identified alternative to short-term suspension programming; LEAs with in-school suspension programs with alternative to short-term suspension components or alternative schools with alternatives to short-term suspension components; LEAs with targeted alternatives to short-term suspension programming; or LEAs with alternatives to short-term suspension of some type. Research conducted through the follow-up telephone interviews and program site visits allowed DJJDP – Center staff to analyze the focus area and collaboration of existing programming identified by LEAs as alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension.

## **Data Collection**

Data for this report was collected using various methods: telephone surveys; telephone interviews; and site visits. Findings obtained through this survey identified “snapshot” information regarding alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension; the findings reflected information obtained from one source at one point in time. Program information identified via the telephone survey was obtained from one person, usually located in the central office. An important point to make is that this one person may or may not have had complete information regarding programming at the building level in the LEA of interest.

Telephone surveys were conducted with all 117 of North Carolina’s LEAs. Previous DJJDP Center contacts, ranging from School Resource Officer (SRO) supervisors to superintendents, from the central office were contacted. The contacts were asked a standardized set of questions (Attachment A) regarding alternative-to-suspension programs in their school system. These questions were used to identify alternative programming in each LEA as well as contact information for specific programs.

Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with each LEA which indicated the existence of an alternative to short-term suspension program in their LEA during the telephone survey. These interviews were conducted based on contact information obtained during the initial telephone survey. The follow-up interviews, conducted primarily with program directors, were used to gather more details regarding program operation. The questions asked of the directors were informal and allowed the directors the opportunity to highlight specific aspects of their programs. This interview also allowed DJJDP – Center staff to determine program start dates, program focus area, and population served by the program.

The final method for collecting data was site visits to existing alternatives to out-of-school suspension programs. Because of timing regarding the end of the school year as well as limitations placed on state employee travel as a result of the budget crisis, all thirty-three programs were not visited. Fourteen site visits were conducted to programs in various areas and regions of the state. On these site visits, DJJDP – Center staff observed the general operation of the programs. The program site visits revealed not only the responsibilities of the program staff but also a clearer understanding of the LEA use and focus area of the program.

## **Findings**

Results from research conducted by DJJDP – Center regarding alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension programs were examined based on two factors: identification of programming efforts and information about existing programs. The identification of programming efforts involved the identification of alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension programs in North Carolina’s 117 LEAs. Information about existing programs elaborated on the thirty-three identified programming efforts in order to determine the focus area and type of collaboration of each program.

## Identification of Programming Efforts

Through the telephone survey, existing programs in each LEA were divided based on four categories: LEAs with no identified alternative to short-term suspension programming; LEAs with in-school suspension programs (ISS) with alternative to short-term suspension components or alternative schools with alternatives to short-term suspension components; LEAs with targeted alternatives to short-term suspension programming; or LEAs with alternatives to short-term suspension of some type. In each response category, LEAs were also divided into four regions: western; piedmont; central; and eastern (Attachment B).

Fifty-nine LEAs identified no programs providing alternatives to students who have been short-term out-of-school suspended. Of the fifty-nine without identified programming, fourteen LEAs were from the western region, seventeen from the piedmont region, sixteen from the central region, and twelve from the eastern region. Students in these LEAs were sent home under the supervision of their parents when out-of-school suspended for any length of time. Data from DPI for school year 2000-2001 indicated that twenty-seven of these fifty-nine LEAs fall within the top fifty LEAs for number of students short-term suspended.

LEAs with ISS programs with short-term suspension components or alternative schools / programs with short-term suspension components were cited as the second category. In most cases, students short-term out-of-school suspended in these nineteen LEAs were sent home under the supervision of their parents when suspended for any length of time. Exceptions, however, were made in light of extenuating circumstances in these specific LEAs. Often students with extenuating circumstances would be allowed to participate in ISS or the local alternative school as a way of serving short-term suspension time. For example, in some cases, a student who would surpass the maximum number of absences allowed per student as a result of days counted absent because of a suspension would be allowed to serve suspension time in ISS or at the school's alternative school / program. These exceptions were determined based on the number of absences along with the offense leading to suspension. Of the nineteen LEAs with this type of option, four were from the western region, three were from the piedmont region, three from the central region, and nine from the eastern region.

Programming Efforts (n=117 LEAs)	
LEAs* with no identified alternative to short-term suspension programming	59
LEAs with in-school suspension programs with alternative to short-term suspension components or alternative schools with alternatives to short-term suspension component	19
LEAs with targeted alternatives to short-term suspension programming	6
LEAs with alternatives to short-term suspension of some type	33

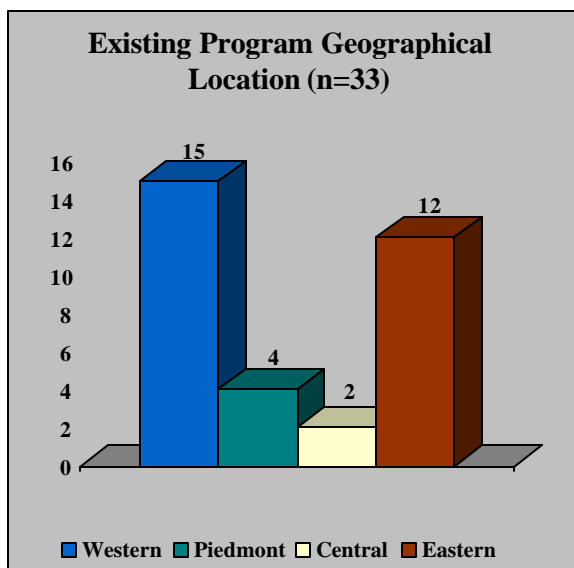
The third category for programming efforts classified LEAs with narrow programming into one category. Within this category, LEAs identified programs serving

\* local education agency

specific populations of short-term out-of-school suspended students. For example, a program offered to those students in danger of

being short-term out-of-school suspended for smoking would serve only a selected portion of the entire student population. Six LEAs with two from each of the piedmont, central, and eastern regions were identified as offering this type of alternative to short-term out-of-school suspension.

LEAs that identified some type of programming serving short-term out-of-school suspended students were placed in the fourth category. Thirty-three LEAs indicated this type of programming in their school system. According to their location, fifteen were in the western region, four in the piedmont region, two in the central region, and twelve in the eastern region. Fourteen of the thirty-three LEAs who indicated the presence of alternative to short-term suspension programs were visited by DJJDP – Center staff. Of the programs contacted through follow-up interviews and site visits, a majority indicated that students who participate in the identified programs would receive academic and attendance credit.



### Existing Programming

Through research in the form of follow-up telephone interviews and program site visits, DJJDP – Center staff analyzed the thirty-three LEAs which identified programs serving as alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. According to geographic location and based on regions previously identified for programming efforts, fifteen LEAs were from the western region, four from the piedmont region, two from the central region, and twelve from the eastern region. Because of local funding issues, several programs in the western and eastern regions were not funded for the 2002-2003 school year.

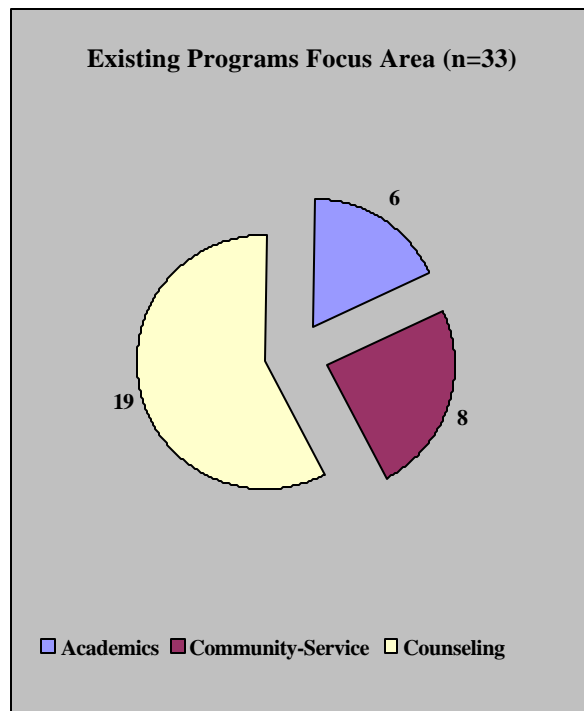
The population served by the thirty-three identified programs was also analyzed. This category refers to the grade of the students eligible for program participation. While some students in grades other than those identified by the ranges are occasionally accepted, seven programs served kindergarten through twelfth grades, eight programs served sixth through eight grades, sixteen programs served sixth through twelfth grades, and two served ninth through twelfth grades. A majority of the programs offering alternatives to suspension were offered to middle and high school students. Many of the programs offer the same services at their various middle school and high school campuses throughout the school system. Other programs operated from one location where students of various ages were responsible for reporting to their location.

In addition to analysis conducted to determine the geographic location and population served by each program, each of the thirty-three programs was analyzed in order to determine their focus area and types of collaboration. Explanation and examples of each focus area (academic, counseling, or community-service) are provided (Attachment C). Additionally, explanation and examples of each type of collaboration (LEA only, community-only, or LEA-community) are given (Attachment D).

*Focus Area*

The thirty-three programs identified by LEAs as alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension were classified as academic based, community-service based, or counseling based. Academic programs have traditional school-based approaches. Six of the thirty-three identified programs had an academic focus. In this type of program, students typically spent the day in a self-contained classroom, often on a separate campus from their school. Students participating in this type of program attend class on a normal schedule, completing assignments obtained from their respective teachers. During the school day, they receive intensive one-on-one assistance on academic assignments. While several of the programs had community service or counseling aspects, the primary focus was academic.

The Glenn Center in Cabarrus County exemplified the academic-focused program. Beginning in 1997, students in grades six through twelve out-of-school suspended for three or more days from schools in Cabarrus County were given the opportunity to serve their suspensions at the Glenn Center. In this program, students provide their own transportation and report to the Glenn Center for normal school hours. During these hours, students spend time completing homework assigned by their classroom teachers. The Glenn Center, operated as a division of Cabarrus County Schools, allows students the opportunity to receive one-on-one academic attention from certified teachers located on-site. Students participating in this program also receive full credit for completed assignments as well as for attendance.



Community-service programs focus on service and community outreach. Eight of the thirty-three programs had a community-service focus. Students participating in this type of alternative usually spend their suspension time conducting community outreach or service. LEAs using this approach collaborated primarily with local non-profit organizations in order to provide supervision and structure while students were away from school. While academics are not the focus of these programs, all programs utilizing this approach provided specific time during the workday for students to complete homework and other assignments. As with the programs with other focuses, students usually receive full attendance and academic credit for time and work completed.

Burke Alternatives To Suspension (B.A.T.S.), located in Burke County, is an LEA program serving as an example for community-service based programs. The program is a school - community approach focused on combining community service with successful completion of

assigned schoolwork during short-term suspension (three to ten day) periods. Students in grades sixth through twelve "serve" their suspension time while providing community service at various county non-profit agencies. While time is set aside each day so that schoolwork can be completed, the focus of the program is on behavior modification through community service. Credit is awarded for attendance as well as completed homework. B.A.T.S. has three staff members responsible for assigning and monitoring student involvement with community organizations.

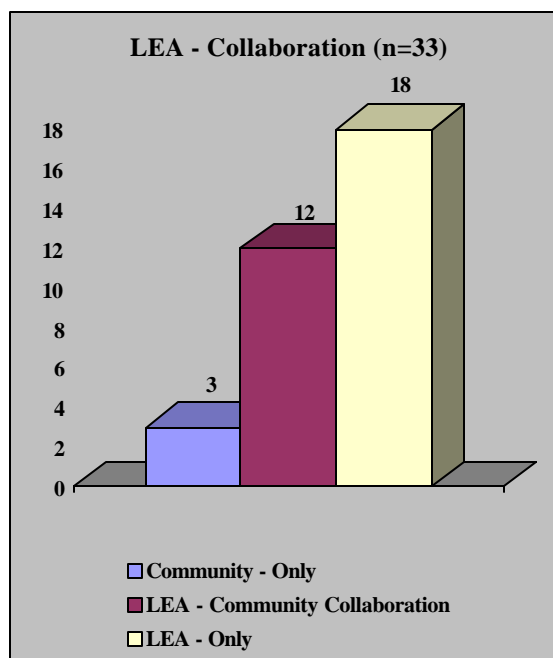
Programs with a counseling focus concentrate on behavior modification. Nineteen of the thirty-three identified programs had a counseling focus. These programs focused on student, family, and parent counseling. Sessions were conducted at various times and locations, depending on the specific program. Most programs made attempts to offer group classes or workshops dealing with relevant issues (e.g., anger management, parenting skills) at times when both students and parents could attend. As with the other focus areas, the counseling programs tended to allow time for academics and community outreach as well.

Project Stride, which began as a collaborative effort between Wilson County Schools and a community counseling agency and has since been developed into a school system program, is an example of an alternative to short-term out-of-school suspension program with a counseling focus. Project Stride is located on the campus of a local counseling agency and serves students in grades six through nine. Students are given the opportunity to complete assigned homework each day and are awarded credit for both homework and attendance. The focus, however, of Project Stride is on behavior modification. Each day efforts are made to develop problem-solving, decision-making, and other life skills.

### *Types of Collaboration*

Collaboration of existing programs was based on the funding source: LEA; community; or combination of LEA and community. In this context "community" is defined as the participation of any organization or agency other than the LEA. Three of the thirty-three were community - only funded, twelve were collaborations between the LEA and the community, and eighteen were LEA-only funded.

Three programs identified and visited through the DJJDP – Center phone survey were exclusively funded through community (usually faith-based) organizations. These programs operated with either formal or informal agreements with the local school system. These private programs were required to have their own insurance to cover students during their participation in the program. Although these programs operated without



financial support from the LEA, in all four programs meals were provided at normal student prices from the LEAs.

Stay Up While You Are Out of Eastern North Carolina, located in Pitt County, is an example of a program offering students alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension but operated solely by a community organization. This program, operated by a local faith-based organization, allows students in kindergarten through twelfth grades to earn partial academic credit for work completed during program participation. Attendance credit is awarded only if the student is at risk of failure due to numerous absences. The program operates with an academic focus, offering one-on-one attention for students. This specific program operates with an informal agreement with Pitt County schools. While students may be awarded academic or attendance credit, the school system is not responsible for students participating in the program.

Twelve LEAs collaborated with local agencies in order to offer alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. Formal agreements with the involved parties were developed in order to outline program responsibilities. In these programs, schools, county agencies, and private agencies worked in collaboration to offer programs.

The B.A.D.G.E. (Becoming Achievers and Doers thru Guided Education) program in Haywood County is operated through a Governor's Crime Commission grant awarded to Haywood County Schools, the Haywood Parks and Recreation Department, and the Waynesville Police Department. In this program, a memorandum of agreement outlines the responsibilities of each agency. The B.A.D.G.E. program operates with an academic focus allowing students in grades six through eight to receive academic and attendance credit for program participation. This program was the only mandatory program of the thirty-three identified alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension programs. By virtue of its location, rooms within the Waynesville Senior Citizen Center, the students daily perform several hours of community service.

A majority of LEAs offering alternatives to out-of-school suspension programs funded the programs through their local budgets. These programs utilize local school buildings as well as school system personnel for the functioning of their programs. Questions regarding liability and responsibility for students were also avoided because of program operation as an entity of the local public school system.

The Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension Program at the Warlick Alternative School in Gaston County is a school-based in-school suspension model funded solely by Gaston County Schools. While the program operates a self-contained classroom, it is housed in the Warlick Alternative School, the school system's alternative learning program. The program has two school system staff members, one full-time teacher and one full-time teacher assistant, responsible for monitoring student academic progress while participating in the program. Students in grades six through twelve are awarded academic credit for attendance and completion of assignments if they choose to participate in the program as opposed to being out-of-school suspended.

## Conclusion

North Carolina Governor Mike Easley signed SB71 into law on June 11, 2001. SB71 represents an effort to identify successful programs addressing short-term suspension in North Carolina public schools. As part of SB71, DJJDP and DPI are mandated to collaborate to identify school systems which have short-term suspension programs. As part of this collaborative effort, DJJDP – Center conducted research in order to identify existing short-term suspension programs in North Carolina's 117 school systems. A number of programs were identified, and site visits were conducted to develop more in-depth understanding of the programs.

DJJDP and DPI are required through SB71 to submit a report to the State Board of Education and General Assembly in 2003 outlining findings regarding SB71. During phase one of the SB71 effort, programs were jointly recruited by the departments through a call for proposals. This call resulted in the identification of two sites, located in Burke and Gaston counties, which meet almost all of the requirements of SB71. Phase two of SB71 involved a second call for proposals. No additional sites were generated from this call, however. The rigorous requirements of the legislation as well as the lack of funding associated with it were determined to be explanations for this lack of response. Phase three of the collaborative effort between DJJDP and DPI involved a request made to the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation via the Attorney General's Office for sponsorship of a forum on alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. Input collected through the three phases, DJJDP – Center research, and the forum will be outlined in the SB71 report given to the State Board of Education and the Education Oversight Committee of the General Assembly in Spring, 2003.

Coterminous with the second call for proposals was research of the 117 school systems in North Carolina. DJJDP – Center carried out this survey in order to identify existing short-term suspension programs. After much effort, the obvious lack of alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspensions was noted by DJJDP – Center. Only thirty-three of the one-hundred and seventeen LEAs in North Carolina offer programs aimed specifically at reducing the academic and behavioral impact of placing a student out of school short term. Funding issues in the current school year further reduced this number; three of the thirty-three programs identified were not funded for the 2002-2003 school year. Site visits were conducted to fourteen programs in order to develop more in-depth understanding of the programs. This report has outlined the findings of this research conducted on alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. Information detailed in this document was provided to DJJDP – Center through an initial telephone survey, follow-up telephone interviews, and existing program site visits. Additionally, the methods by which data was collected were described.

Because of the number of LEAs identified through DJJDP – Center research offering no alternative to short-term out-of-school suspension, DPI decided to conduct additional research. A written survey of the public schools in North Carolina regarding the options available to suspended students is due to DPI in February, 2003. This survey in combination with DJJDP – Center research will allow for a greater understanding of the options available to out-of-school suspended students.