

## IDEAS OF IMPACT

## Suspended Students Get Help Instead of Ticket to Trouble

## PROBLEM

In 1997-98, there were 840 Portland public high school dropouts. The two largest minority groups that withdrew from school and did not re-enroll were Hispanic Americans and Native Americans.



"I Have a Dream Foundation - Oregon" is an educational enhancement program where they "adopt" an entire grade level from an elementary school and establish a long-term relationship with them until they graduate from high school. Together with the parents, their role is to support Dreamers by serving as a guide, friend, tutor, big brother, big sister, or counselor. Dreamer, Brian G. (right) with his Class 4 Sponsor, Vicki Zidell (left).

Faced with a serious behavioral problem or breach of discipline, a school principal may feel the only appropriate response is suspension, even if the suspended student regards the punishment as unscheduled vacation or an opportunity to get into further trouble.

A preferable alternative would be in-school suspension. But many schools lack the resources to supervise this.

These days, however, Ed Hotaling, middle school principal of School 21 in Albany, N.Y. has another option. He is sending students he would have suspended to the Alternative to School Suspension Program offered by Albany's Adolescent Employability Skills Plus Program (AESPP), a private, not-for-profit group that runs various programs to prevent incarceration or reduce recidivism. Here, suspended students receive supervision, counseling and help with their

schoolwork.

Sandra Koss, AESPP's executive director and a certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor, said the program started when the group realized many of the inmates it serves in its pre- and post release programs first had problems in middle school. She said her organization wanted to address some of the burgeoning issues for these students before they landed in jail.

School administrators from around the district send an average of seven to nine students each school day to the AESPP building. Each student starts his or her suspension with an individual counseling session to help identify needs and determine causes of the suspension. In the morning, the students focus on academics, while the afternoon is dedicated to counseling and growth exercises, which follow AESPP's copyrighted curriculum. Students may hear a talk

by an outside professional to expose them to future options, Koss said, or watch a video about compassion or black heroes, then write an essay about it. But what makes the AESPP program different from other suspension programs is its use of the "recovery model" to help students make important changes. This model, Koss explained, is traditionally used in substance abuse counseling and known to many in the form of 12-step programs. It focuses on accepting personal responsibility and the "three A's of change: admitting there's a problem, accepting the consequences and taking action to be different the next time," Koss said.

Karen Pirozzi

## Let Students Teach Students

At a time when the education system is under attack, with parents complaining that classes are too large, and employers turning down high school graduates who can't write a letter, an innovative program - peer tutoring - is beginning to gain ground in schools around the country.

In peer tutoring, students teach each other, with an older student

usually tutoring a younger one. Because the approach has proved effective in cutting dropout rates and raising achievement levels, some experts see peer tutoring as the most cost-effective, practical way to solve the crisis in America's schools.

Educators point out that by using students instead of adults as tutors, the programs reach twice as many students and provide the peer sup-

port that is so important to children.

Studies indicate that young students like teaching other, younger students, according to advocates of peer tutoring.

Keeping young people in school is one of the goals of peer tutoring.

Joy Darlington

## Recruit More Minority Special-Ed Teachers

Studies show that minority children with special educational needs usually make the most progress when their class teacher is of a similar ethnic background, but special education teachers from minorities are in critically short supply.

The Alliance Project, funded by the federal Office of Special Education Programs, is assisting more than 1,000 special education faculty members from nearly 400 institutions in the United States, Guam and Puerto Rico in writing grant applications for more federal funding.

"It's important not just for minority students to see minority faculty, but majority students as well because there's so many stereotypes on both sides of the fence," explains Dr. JoVita

Wells of The Alliance Project. "It's good for all of us, but particularly good for minority students to see minority faculty and have some commonality with the person before them."

Learning from teachers with similar backgrounds benefits the children in several ways," says Deborah Smith, principal investigator of the Alliance Project. "Take, for example, a special-needs youngster whose dominant language is not English. Teachers unfamiliar with a student's culture, language and background can't offer "anchored instruction," in which the teacher relates what is being taught in class to some experience or activity the student already understands or possesses," Smith said.

Carol Davis

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