



Qualitative Findings from Focus Groups Examining Connecticut Suspension and Expulsion Practices

Presentation to the Suspension and Expulsion Task Force of the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee on 11/3/2022

OVERVIEW OF PATTERNS BY AREA (with Reference Quotes)

Area 1: Data & Accountability 3

 Pattern 1.1- Transparency and fidelity of implementation 3

 Pattern 1.2–Flexibility and clarity of outcomes based on behavior 3

 Pattern 1.3- Surplus of duties during staff shortages 3

 Pattern 1.4- State standards vs. student readiness..... 3

 Pattern 1.5- Fear of responsibility without authority or support 3

 Pattern 1.6- Perceptions of protection for teachers..... 3

 Pattern 1.7- Confirming use of graduated response/sanctions 4

 Pattern 1.8- Capacity to respond before escalation 4

 Pattern 1.9- Time allocated for training 4

 Pattern 1.10- Transition time for culture shift 4

Area 2: Family & Community Engagement.....5

- Pattern 2.1- Reality vs. expectations of teachers.....5
- Pattern 2.2- Parents advocating for student support.....5
- Pattern 2.3- Parents as collaborators.....5
- Pattern 2.4- Parent accountability5
- Pattern 2.5 – Comprehensive problem-solving5
- Pattern 2.6- Younger youth’s experiences with ED5
- Pattern 2.7- Extent of the harm when ED is used.....5

Area 3: Professional Learning6

- Pattern 3.1- Shift in educator expectations and requirements.....6
- Pattern 3.2- Staff turnover6
- Pattern 3.3- Differential treatment due to cultural competency6
- Pattern 3.4- Shift in student readiness6
- Pattern 3.5- Shift is expected student demographic6
- Pattern 3.6- Identification/Labeling.....6
- Pattern 3.7- Intentional community building6
- Pattern 3.8- Restorative practices as a tool for de-escalation.....7
- Pattern 3.9- Valuing youth voice and due process7

Area 1: Data & Accountability

Pattern 1.1- Transparency and fidelity of implementation

“You follow the policies, you read the regulations, you read the law. **But you don't really know if you're calibrating with all of your peers.** Are we more harsh than another district? Are we less restorative than another district? You'd like to think that we're restorative. But there are definitely some mindsets amongst board of eds that punitive is the way to go, teach a lesson, consequences instead of intervention.”

Pattern 1.2–Flexibility and clarity of outcomes based on behavior

“Every situation is different; every kid is different. I think, um my biggest issue is **there isn't explicit details** of how we are going to discipline our students for explicit behaviors.”

Pattern 1.3- Surplus of duties during staff shortages

“For a lot of schools is that there's just not enough of us support staff and even more so, right now, when we're experiencing a shortage of staff in general in the school system **there's such a high need and there's not a lot of us. So, we're always spread thin.**”

Pattern 1.4- State standards vs. student readiness

“Because we have four year olds coming into kindergarten and **they're not ready for the academic demand that the state, you know, is expecting us to report.** And our teachers are rule-followers, so they think they need to stay on pace, and we've seen with a pandemic they're not anywhere near where K kids had been in the past. And so, we're seeing a lot of explosive behaviors in kindergarten.”

Pattern 1.5- Fear of responsibility without authority or support

“I think that yes like there it seems like there's not enough staff, but I also find that a lot of our teachers are almost like nervous to deal with anything related to a student's like mental health. And even some situations I think a teacher would actually be really great and helpful **they're almost like afraid because they don't want it to somehow fall back on them that they didn't handle it correctly,** but I think that a lot of teachers could actually do a lot more in regard to emotion you know emotional wellness.”

Pattern 1.6- Perceptions of protection for teachers

“One of the things that we struggle with as leaders, this can sound really cold, but are the teachers and the teachers Union and their perception of what we should do with students who are aggressive, even at the K-2 level. You know, sad to say, we've had several teachers file assault against 3,4, 5 year olds. **And the perception that, you know schools aren't doing anything to protect teachers,** I think they need to have this. Knowledge, at least in the back of their minds when they're thinking about, you know, what we're doing, because it is definitely a factor, you know in how we handle things, unfortunately, because of that perception of we're not keeping our teachers safe. So, it's just something. I know it's not the most positive thing, but it's definitely reality, and I can't imagine I'm the only school district that deals with that.”

Pattern 1.7- Confirming use of graduated response/sanctions

“A lot of times at my school I do sit on a lot of the decisions being made with my principle in terms of a child being asked to stay home and **I go through kind of like a checklist with them Okay so before we got into this point what kind of strategies have we done.** I actually did a PD a couple of weeks ago about addressing behavior and discipline like using our SRBI models, so we got what kind of first tier strategies did you use? What kind of second tier? Before you get to that third tier, can you show me what you've done to kind of get us here?”

Pattern 1.8- Capacity to respond before escalation

“And so, sometimes I see blowups happen like right as we're about to go back into the classroom. I also think time is like huge because **I sometimes am already de-escalating someone else when I get a call to de-escalate another student.** And so that students probably waiting for a minute, and maybe they're waiting quietly, but maybe they're just boiling up so by the time I'm ready to de-escalate with them, they are past the point of wanting to talk about it so that can be really tricky too.”

Pattern 1.9- Time allocated for training

“**For us it's the time to do the training,** I think that we have. We have people who are well versed in what to do during the training, but the time to do it is really complicated.”

Pattern 1.10- Transition time for culture shift

“I do think it's important for schools to focus on a climate shift and a culture shift within schools when they're trying to implement new interventions and new programs and supports. I feel like I'm realizing at my school that's been a little bit of a challenge 'cause we're trying to do things so quickly we're trying to address causes so quickly that **we're forgetting that there's a culture change and a culture shift that needs to be nurtured in the process.** So, just adapting to that and trying to get students and staff on board to that and buy into some of the strategies that we're implementing is part of a challenge that I see.”

Area 2: Family & Community Engagement

Pattern 2.1- Reality vs. expectations of teachers

“I just think that's where part of it goes wrong, is that **people think that being a classroom teacher means one thing, and it really means something very different.**”

Pattern 2.2- Parents advocating for student support

parents need to also fight for their kids. In terms of advocating for getting either IEP or evaluation of those kids and **a lot of times parents don't understand their role or what they can do, or how to be an advocate for their child**, because sometimes a child doesn't have people watching out for them.

Pattern 2.3- Parents as collaborators

“Yeah, I've had lots of experience of trying to you know kind of really pull parents in as partners just in that mindset of, hey your kid pulled a major screw up here in middle school. That's bad, but you know what **the consequences are still manageable at this at this age in this level. Let's work together**”

Pattern 2.4- Parent accountability

“You know to be honest but something I'd like to do more of that just isn't as many opportunities is I hate to say it but you know you need to start holding some parents accountable for their students actions unfortunately and it's we all say it but it's how do you do it, you know, the elementary level **most of our issues are not kid issues they're adult issues.**”

Pattern 2.5 – Comprehensive problem-solving

“We need to figure out what happened why it occur or the context and **what we need to do to avoid that in the future** it also set the condition for other kids to know that it is an inappropriate behavior so and it gave everyone else a chance to problem-solve.”

Pattern 2.6- Younger youth's experiences with ED

“We tend to see the younger kids, they're very caring for each other and **they don't want to see their friends upset either they don't want to see their friends excluded.** They can't put a connection between, no they don't think like the older kids understand why students being excluded so for them they feel like their classmates being punished, which can oftentimes upset them as well.”

Pattern 2.7- Extent of the harm when ED is used

“I think the child, the families are harmed. I think the school districts are even harmed as well. Because **you kind of set a precedent that we won't work with children.** We won't work with children that don't fit our mold. I don't really think it helps anyone.”

Area 3: Professional Learning

Pattern 3.1- Shift in educator expectations and requirements

“Teacher preparation programs, and what number one is being messaged about the role of a teacher; I think that has changed drastically, and **a lot of people don't recognize what the role of teaching actually requires.** And so, I think that we have to shift our message around what it means to be an educator.”

Pattern 3.2- Staff turnover

“We talk about the training and **investing all of that time and money into somebody and then they up and leave** and then you have a new person coming in, when you've just done all of this training”

Pattern 3.3- Differential treatment due to cultural competency

“So, we're working on that but where I see that come through the most is actually at our middle school level that **teachers treat the behaviors of students of color differently and sometimes it's because they come in with different behaviors and there's a cultural difference.** They're coming from a school where culturally those behaviors are considered normal; everyone understands what they mean.”

Pattern 3.4- Shift in student readiness

It really should be as much of a limited basis as possible just due to the exposure factor, and especially coming off a pandemic, where these little guys have not had perhaps preschool, daycare. **They really haven't had the exposure of learning how to listen to someone else's direction** and really have an ego-centric, lens in a sense. For them, it's not just all about them.

Pattern 3.5- Shift in expected student demographic

“I think the demographic has changed dramatically in our school community over the last like five or six years. But the teachers are all still really homegrown like a lot of their teachers have been to the actual school we're teaching in or are very close to the community so their perception of our school community is one way **they're very surprised at kids who are coming 'cause we had a huge influx of families throughout the pandemic** from New York because the housing was more affordable in Hamden than it was in you know the Bronx or wherever.”

Pattern 3.6- Identification/Labeling

I know I have a specific student that where she used to tap her pen, shake her legs before she goes into full panic attack. **A teacher saw it when it happened and thought she was just being annoying.** So, some kids it's a little more subtle, where other kids they may be yelling or screaming or cursing. That would be a little difficult for me because I've seen it on both ends of the spectrum.

Pattern 3.7- Intentional community building

“So, the other part that we work on the instructional side is **how can we make it so fun so that kids don't want to leave,** like this that's the worst thing in the world to you know go take a break from the class or like not be able to play with friends or something like that”

Pattern 3.8- Restorative practices as a tool for de-escalation

“So, a lot of times you'll get the student to a de-escalated point and then you'll bring them back to the classroom and **they get escalated again. Because the teacher may, kind of chew them out again for what happened, instead of being ready to move on**, or may demand an apology and the student's not quite enough space to apologize yet they've deescalated but they've not yet reached that point where they feel remorseful.”

Pattern 3.9- Valuing youth voice and due process

“When we discipline kids, we offer due process to those kids, so we want to hear their side of the story. So, even when we're going to, again, I just want to make sure we're hearing the question right, so there would not be a formal hearing, but there certainly would be, typically, when we, when we, when, when the discipline consequence is a exclusionary practice, suspension or expulsion, **we as school administrators would offer due process for that student, so that we understand their side of the incident. Even if, even if they were 100% wrong, we still hear, hear their side.** You know “I punched Steven in the face, because he called me a bad name.””