

Public Act 103-0896

Guidance for Re-Engagement



Introduction

This guidance on the re-engagement of students who are returning to school after the conclusion of exclusionary discipline is published pursuant to Public Act 103-0896, which went into effect Aug. 9, 2024. It mandates the following:

*A school district shall create a policy to facilitate the re-engagement of students who are suspended out-of-school, expelled, or returning from an alternative school setting. **In consultation with stakeholders deemed appropriate by the State Board of Education, the State Board of Education shall draft and publish guidance for the re-engagement of students who are suspended out-of-school, expelled, or returning from an alternative school setting in accordance with this Section and Section 13A-4 on or before July 1, 2025.** (Emphasis added.)*

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Re-engaging a student after an exclusionary discipline event (e.g., suspension, expulsion, alternative placement) is an important process that helps students reconnect with their school community and ensures they have access to the supports they need to achieve their goals. This guidance provides a framework for facilitating a successful re-engagement process.

When developing a re-engagement plan, schools should utilize a multidisciplinary team, including appropriate related service providers, teachers, and paraprofessionals who will be working directly with the returning student, and school administrators. The student and their parents or guardians also should be involved in the development of the re-engagement plan. If there are safety concerns, all school personnel should be made aware of the plan.

The multidisciplinary team should consider what assessments might be necessary to determine a student's needs and use any relevant data (e.g., academic performance, attendance records, discipline history) to determine what interventions and supports might be necessary. This may be part of a district's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). This [SEL MTSS Toolkit For State and District Leaders](#) from the Council of Chief State School Officials; the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; and the American Institutes for Research states:

A multi-tiered system of supports is a proactive and preventive framework that integrates data and instruction to maximize student achievement and support students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs from a strengths-based perspective.

The Toolkit advocates for integrating social-emotional learning and MTSS practices to meet the needs of the whole child. In addition, if a school uses restorative practices, the re-engagement plan also should include a restorative conference, which will be discussed in the Social and Emotional Support section beginning on page 5 of this guide.

The development of a successful re-engagement plan should include consideration of the following issues:

1. Student safety and behavior support,
2. Academic support. and
3. Social and emotional support.

The plan should be updated based on ongoing monitoring and data collection to ensure the student's success.

Student Safety and Behavior Support

To ensure a safe return to school, the multidisciplinary team must address any safety concerns that led to the suspension, expulsion, or alternative placement. This might include an **Individual Student Safety Plan**, depending on the circumstances.

A safety plan is a tool to ensure the safety and well-being of students when their behaviors may be dangerous to themselves or others. Safety plans should specifically address these dangerous behaviors. School staff, school administrators, parents, and community agency staff (when appropriate) should be involved in the development of the safety plan.¹ These plans provide support and resources to the individual student. The safety plan should be updated any time the student demonstrates additional unsafe behaviors and at regular intervals throughout the school year.

- [Example Individual Student Safety Plan from Chicago Public Schools.](#)

¹ See [Government of Ontario – Student safety plan.](#)

In addition, a **Behavioral Support Plan** or a **Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)** might be appropriate. A Behavioral Support Plan is a written plan that is designed to reduce or eliminate inappropriate behavior. A behavioral intervention in an educational setting is a targeted response to an unpreferred behavior that interferes with the student's learning or that of others. Interventions should be designed to develop or strengthen alternative or more appropriate behaviors, and they should include specific methods of evaluation and measurable behavioral changes that are expected of the student. Provisions for communicating with the parents/guardians about their child's behavior and coordinating school-based and home-based interventions also are essential elements.²

[Questions and Answers: Addressing the Needs of Children with Disabilities and IDEA's Discipline Provisions](#) (July 2022), a document produced by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, states:

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is used to understand the function and purpose of a child's specific, interfering behavior and factors that contribute to the behavior's occurrence and non-occurrence for the purpose of developing effective positive behavioral interventions, supports, and other strategies to mitigate or eliminate interfering behavior.

FBA should include a clear, specific, measurable, and objective description of the behavior that is interfering with the student's learning or the learning of others. Development of an FBA requires a structured data collection process that includes direct observation across various settings and informal assessments, such as rating scales and parent/teacher/student interviews and reports, to determine where, when, and why specific behaviors are occurring.³ An FBA should detail the prior interventions that have been implemented and the success rate for those interventions across different settings.⁴

A BIP is a plan to teach replacement behaviors, make changes to the situations that contribute to target behaviors, and teach other missing skills.⁵ For BIPs to be effective, they should:

- Identify the replacement behaviors that will replace the target behavior and the positive supports staff will implement to teach students to use the appropriate, defined replacement behavior (such as modeling, practicing, teaching, feedback, cues, and patterns of reinforcement);
- Document additional supports that will be provided or adjustments to the student's learning environment;
- Describe how behavior will be measured and data collected; and
- Identify a plan for communicating the BIP to relevant school staff and for communicating data and progress to the student's parent or guardian.⁶

² See ISBE Guidance Document, [Behavioral Interventions in Schools: Guidelines for the Development of District Policies for Students with Disabilities](#).

³ See *id.* at pg. 10.

⁴ See *id.*

⁵ See ISBE Parent Guide, [Educational Rights and Responsibilities: Understanding Special Education in Illinois](#).

⁶ See *id.* at pg. 69.

School staff should be equipped with the skills and support needed to teach positive behavioral strategies and replacement behavior to ensure effective implementation of a BIP.⁷ FBAs and BIPs are typically associated with students with disabilities, but they can be used for any student whose behavior is impacting the learning of themselves and/or others. There is much evidence that supports FBAs and BIPs as effective approaches to addressing students' behavior.⁸

Illinois Administrative Code

"Functional Behavioral Assessment" means an assessment process for gathering information regarding the target behavior, its antecedents and consequences, controlling variables, the student's strengths, and the communicative and functional intent of the behavior, for use in developing interventions.⁹

- [ISBE Functional Behavioral Assessment Template](#)
- [Behavioral Intervention Plans \(IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University\)](#)
- [ISBE Behavioral Intervention Plan Template](#)

If a student is receiving special education services, it might be appropriate to consider changes to their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan to address any student safety or behavior concerns.

Academic Support

Next, it is important to foster a supportive and encouraging learning environment. This might begin with a review of the student's academic needs and the development of an individualized plan that includes appropriate and available interventions, such as tutoring or small group instruction.

Credit recovery options for high school students may be needed to ensure students earn missing credits to stay on track for graduation. In addition, schools might consider implementing an Individualized Learning Plan. An **Individualized Learning Plan** helps students define their college and career goals and choose courses to support these goals. Developing an Individualized Learning Plan allows students to take an active role in planning their future, increasing motivation and engagement.¹⁰

This process also might include consideration of a **College and Career Pathway Endorsement**. Students earn endorsements by completing an Individualized Learning Plan, a career-focused instructional sequence, and professional learning opportunities.

- See ISBE [College and Career Pathway Endorsement webpage](#).

⁷ See e.g., [Behavioral Interventions in Schools: Guidelines for the Development of District Policies for Students with Disabilities; Educational Rights and Responsibilities: Understanding Special Education in Illinois](#); and [Validity of Functional Behavior Assessment Within a Response to Intervention Framework: Evidence, Recommended Practice, and Future Directions](#).

⁸ See [Functional Behavioral Assessment and Students at Risk for or with Emotional Disabilities: Current Issues and Considerations](#).

⁹ See [23 Ill. Adm. Code 226.75](#).

¹⁰ See [Issue Brief: Personalized Learning Plans](#).

Social and Emotional Support

Next, the multidisciplinary team should consider the social and emotional needs of the student.

Restorative justice and restorative practices are an approach to student culture and student discipline that creates and reinforces safe, inclusive, and supportive spaces in schools.¹¹ Restorative approaches focus on:

1. Proactively building community and strengthening the relationships between students, teachers, and administrators.
2. Addressing student discipline issues by focusing on who or what was impacted and how harm can be repaired. Restorative approaches support students as they address and take accountability for their behavior and help them resolve conflicts. Behaviors are viewed as opportunities to teach social-emotional and conflict resolution skills¹² to students rather than chances to punish them for their misbehavior.

The University of Chicago Education Lab (2018–present) analyzed data from 239 Chicago high schools from the 2008–09 through 2018–19 school years. Chicago Public Schools first implemented restorative practice programs in the 2013–14 school year. The [Education Lab study](#) found a 35% reduction in arrests in school, a 15% reduction in out-of-school arrests, and an 18% decrease in out-of-school suspensions in schools that implemented restorative practice policies. Another study in 2023 found that restorative practices improved students' achievement in English language arts and math, reduced the probability of suspensions and number of days students were suspended, and improved school safety overall.¹³ There is a growing body of research that highlights many positive outcomes associated with these practices.

Planning a [restorative conference](#) and/or a re-engagement conference might be helpful components of a re-engagement plan. Restorative conferences are a structured process that brings together individuals who have been directly affected by a harmful incident or conflict, along with relevant stakeholders, to engage in open dialogue, understanding, and healing. The purpose of a restorative conference is to address the harm caused, repair relationships, and find resolutions that meet the needs of all parties involved.

A re-engagement conference, which also could be called a “welcome back conference,” is an opportunity for the multidisciplinary team to meet with the student and their parents or guardians to discuss the student's strengths, the support they can offer to the student, and the steps necessary to ensure the student's success as they re-engage in school.^{14 15}

In addition, the multidisciplinary team might want to consider appropriate and available interventions to support a student's social and emotional development. For example, individual or group counseling, meetings with the school psychologist, or meetings with the school social worker might be needed to help the student develop the social and emotional skills that are necessary to address any underlying behavioral or mental health concerns.

¹¹ See [The Restorative Approach and its Strategies](#).

¹² See [School-Wide Restorative Practices: Step-by-Step](#).

¹³ See [Fostering Belonging, Transforming Schools: The Impact of Restorative Practices](#).

¹⁴ See Oregon Department of Education: [Re-Engaging with Success After an Exclusionary Discipline Event](#).

¹⁵ See Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds: [Reengagement Planning after Long-term Suspension or Expulsion](#).

Specific cognitive behavioral interventions might be identified to help students navigate future challenging situations in constructive ways. Two evidenced-based programs that might be of interest are [Aggression Replacement Training](#) or [Skillstreaming](#).

[How Restorative Practices Work for Students and Educators](#)

[Teacher Perspectives on Effective Restorative Practice Implementation: Identifying Programmatic Elements that Promote Positive Relational Development in Schools](#)

Ongoing Monitoring

Finally, the multidisciplinary team should schedule regular check-ins (e.g., every four weeks) to positively connect with the students and their parents or guardians, monitor the student's progress, and make any necessary adjustments to the re-engagement plan. It also is important to acknowledge and celebrate the student's achievements and help the student reflect on their progress and personal growth.

Conclusion

Re-engagement of students after a suspension, expulsion, or time in an alternative school setting is an important process to give them the opportunity to rebuild self-esteem, grow and learn from their mistakes, and reconnect with their school community and repair relationships. The evidence-based practices described in this guidance should be used as a building block by schools and districts to put processes in place to re-engage students in school and ensure their success after they have experienced the consequences of exclusionary discipline.