

GUIDELINES FOR THE REGIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The following guidelines were developed by the 35-member Illinois Alternative Education Work Group to assist in program design and implementation for the Regional Safe Schools Program. The Work Group was established to advise the State on the implementation of the Safe Schools Law (PA 89-383) and to recommend a framework to ensure that research-based characteristics for program quality are incorporated into all Illinois alternative education programs serving disruptive youth.

- A. Governance.** Regional superintendents (except in Cook County) and the Chicago Board of Education and the executive directors of the three Intermediate Service Centers in Suburban Cook County in consultation with the district superintendents within their ESR may establish the Regional Safe Schools Program, an alternative school program for disruptive youth within the ESR or a consortium of ESRs. Formal agreements between the regional offices, sending schools, local community service providers and area businesses need to be established. The agreements clarify the roles and responsibilities of each provider. Operating procedures for administrative transfer, maintenance of student records, student transportation, special education services, career development and private sector work experience should be maintained.

Rationale. The governance of the Regional Safe Schools Program is established in legislation. Formal agreements, particularly those governing the administrative transfer of students between educational entities, must be established to ensure smooth transitions for students.

- B. Student Eligibility.** Students currently enrolled in grades 6 through 12 who meet criteria established by ROEs in conjunction with local school superintendents such as:

- suspended at least twice for a period of 4-10 days for gross misconduct as defined by the Regional Safe Schools Program.
- arrested by the police and/or remanded to juvenile or criminal courts for acts related to school activities.
- eligible for disciplinary reassignment pursuant to violation of school district “zero tolerance” policies.
- involved in misconduct that can be demonstrated as serious, repetitive and/or cumulative.
- previously remediated at least once by the local school district.

Rationale. There is wide variation in school disciplinary policies but consensus is needed on what is meant by gross misconduct.

- C. Local Community Involvement.** The regional superintendent should involve the community in the design, implementation and evaluation of the Regional Safe Schools Program. Community members include representatives of parents, businesses, the criminal justice system, social service agencies or community groups that have a vested interest in the outcomes of the program.

Rationale. Programs with widespread and demonstrated community support are the most successful. Programs should improve overall service delivery in the region, benefit the individual student and improve the school climate in the sending schools. The overall strategy is to maximize educational and behavioral improvement opportunities taking into account the importance of community linkages and parental involvement.

- D. Open Entry and Exit.** The Regional Safe Schools Program should be flexible in its ability to accommodate students who may enter and exit at any given point in the educational continuum and at any given time. The Regional Safe Schools Program should be able to take each student from where he/she is in core subjects to higher levels of mastery.

Rationale. Many Regional Safe Schools Programs students may require a great deal of remediation. This means that the Regional Safe Schools Program is likely to receive students who are at different levels of readiness to learn and progress. In order for the students to have a positive termination from the Regional Safe School Program, instructors should get the students up to a performance level whereby the exit will produce a successful transition. Innovative academic and school-to-work programs, including but not limited to the techniques of work-based learning and technology delivered learning, can be utilized where appropriate.

E. Equity. Policies and procedures should be applied equitably to all students.

F. Individualized Optional Education Plan and Positive Terminations. At the earliest time following the administrative transfer of a disruptive student, personnel from the transferring school and the Regional Safe Schools Program must meet to develop an individualized optional education plan (IOEP) for the student. The student and the student's parent or guardian shall be invited to participate in the development of the IOEP. (If an IOEP has already been developed prior to the transfer, it shall continue to apply until modified. The IOEP should be reviewed regularly and modified as necessary to assure student progress.) This IOEP should include the learning and behavior objectives and activities that the student is to complete in order to meet educational and career goals stated in the IOEP. The IOEP should also contain at least one goal that specifies a positive termination such as: successful return to the transferring school, completion of requirements for high school graduation, passing the GED examination, successful job placement, reduction in disruptive behavior, improved attendance record, or other mutually agreed upon termination outcome.

A student completing Regional Safe Schools Program which has a GED curriculum may take a GED test and, if successful, apply for a GED certificate. The GED option should be exercised when it is appropriate for the individual student and has been determined as appropriate as part of the IOEP process.

Rationale. The development of the individual IOEP should involve the student, parent/guardian, the Regional Safe Schools Program, and transferring school so that everyone has a clear understanding of what is to be accomplished. Students should be made aware of their student classification, rights, privileges, responsibilities and all available services.

G. Rigorous Curriculum, Instruction & Performance Assessment. A multidisciplinary curriculum must be designed to address the individualized needs of the students of the Regional Safe Schools Program with special emphasis toward making the educational experience of each student meaningful and worthwhile. The curriculum should give special attention to innovative methods and technologies to engage students in purposeful learning and be part of a continuum of services. The Regional Safe Schools Program curriculum may include, but is not limited to, the following characteristics:

- comprehensive
- clear goals and objectives
- **follow State standards for academic excellence**
- experiential, emphasizing connections between learning and work
- technology as part of instruction and vocational training
- credit-bearing
- occupational skills training
- foster self-esteem and positive self-image
- life skills and conflict resolution skills training

Rationale. Administratively transferred students who successfully complete the requirements for high school graduation shall receive a diploma identifying them as graduating from the transferring high school or the high school they would have attended.

H. Student/Teacher Ratios. To encourage innovation in program development, class size and student/teacher ratios are not prescribed. However, it is essential that Regional Safe Schools Programs consider these factors as critical in recruiting quality personnel and a significant determinant of student and program outcomes.

I. Integrated Community Services Plan. The Regional Safe Schools Program should draw upon human services available in the ESR and develop a plan that integrates these services with the educational component of the Regional Safe Schools Program. Services could include but are not limited to: alcohol and drug rehabilitation, individual and family counseling, school physicals, mentoring, home visits, career counseling, child care and youth ombudsman.

Rationale. The particular needs of disruptive youth include a wide array of education and social problems that the school alone has difficulty in meeting and which require integration of human services, educational components and other community resources. Therefore, the Regional Safe Schools Program should address the human service and educational needs of these students. Also, the Regional Safe Schools Program should address planning for transition back to the regular school.

J. Staff Qualifications & Professional Development. The regional superintendents (ROES) and in Cook County the Chicago Board of Education and the executive directors of the three Intermediate Service Centers in Suburban Cook County should provide the personnel of the Regional Safe Schools Program and, when appropriate the personnel of participating school districts with staff development that will enable them to make educational decisions and placements that are in the best interest of the students in the Regional Safe Schools Program and participating school districts. In particular, personnel should receive ongoing training in developing IOEPs, creating appropriate learning environments, and educational technology.

Rationale. Since new and innovative programs are being created for this initiative, Regional Safe Schools Program staff will need that latest available training to ensure that they will be effective.