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Alternative to Suspension: Decreasing Suspension Rates for Minority Students

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### Abstract

Between the timeframe of August 2020 - December 2021 Salinas Union High School (SUHSD) suspension rate data was reviewed in the California School Dashboard network. It was determined the suspension rate of this school district exceeded those of its fellow districts. SUHSD has increased their suspension rates of English learners by 2.3%, decreased their suspensions of African American students by 2% and Hispanic students have maintained the same rates as the prior year (caschooldashboard.org). Contributing factors to this social dilemma are lack of knowledge of Alternative to Suspension, unconscious and conscious bias and the newly adopted practice of Social Emotional Support. Consequences of suspension are the “School to Prison Pipeline”, a child’s negative association with education and the stigma a child receives once suspended. Through observing this information it was determined SUHSD required training on Alternatives to Suspension. To assist in the trainings designed to directly illustrate the requirements of Alternatives to Suspension across the district, a Flow Chart has been created for Administrators, Administrative Secretaries and School Social Workers (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS) to keep on hand, ensuring an easy guide to follow. This Flow Chart reviews SUHSD approved Alternative to Suspension programs and compares these with California's Education Code guidelines along with administrative codes associated with each type of alternatives provided within SUHSD. During the training on Alternatives to Suspension provided to SUHSD Administrators, Administrative Secretaries and SSW/IS in the beginning of the Fall 2021 school year, a survey was conducted. This survey was provided to all Administrators as well as all administrative support staff stated above. The survey inquired about participants' comfortability with enacting Alternatives to Suspension, their knowledge on the programs provided and the accessibility of this information if questions arise. In addition to the survey questions, Administrators and Administrative Secretaries were given Empathy Interview questions to assess the preference on distribution of information for each group and if the current method of information distribution is altering any positive outcomes SUHSD could receive through the implementation of Alternative to Suspension. Due to the longevity of the project a post survey will not be conducted until the following school year in May 2022. The data collected will be based on the responses received from 2 Administrators, 16 Administrative Secretary and 13 School Social Workers / Intervention Specialists. Each subgroup was given matching questions to determine the distribution of information within SUHSD. Based on the information received through the data collected, it is my recommendation that the Flow Chart be distributed to each administrator and their support staff. Ensuring it is updated with current information as often as required.

*Keywords: Alternative to suspension, administrative support, social emotional development, suspension*

### **Agency & Communities Served**

Salinas Union High School District (SUHSD) Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) is known for their proactive efforts to increase awareness of student mental health and focusing on creating an inclusive environment for all involved. The PPS department is developed to implement programs and services to better the behavioral, social, and emotional support needs of students (SUHSD, 2020). While also meeting the needs of the students the PPS department ensures they provide emotional support to their staff as well. It is the belief of staff in the PPS department that a person cannot pour from an empty glass, as such, students cannot receive a positive support system if their staff does not have the same support from administrators. They effectively provide these services through the implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) services and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) services (SUHSD, 2020). PBIS and SEL provide guidelines for each program implemented within the school, each program created is based on a data driven approach. These programs are implemented in eleven of the fourteen schools throughout the district (SUHSD, 2020).

Salinas Union High School District as a whole has a passion and drive that can be seen in both administrators and the administrative support staff. With a significant part of the student body at SUHSD being of hispanic heritage and english language learners it is imperative that the school staff and administration focus on providing a safe and accepting environment on each of their campuses. One of the main focuses at SUHSD is to ensure the development of social emotional health within their staff and student body. Their drive stems from their mission statement, "Guided by educational equity and through innovation, discovery, and support, the SUHSD will meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of each student to

ensure achievement of their aspirations” (SUHSD). This statement ensures all staff provide and are provided support to keep a positive and communicative environment.

### **Problem Description**

In Salinas Union High School District (SUHSD) it is known that the suspension rate in students of African American and Hispanic descent and students who are English learners have the highest rates when compared to those of Caucasian and Asian descents and English speakers. Each year this information is reviewed and formalised in the statewide system California Dashboard, according to the website SUHSD has increased their suspension rates of English learners by 2.3%, decreased their suspensions of African American students by 2%, and Hispanic students have maintained the same rates as the prior year (caschooldashboard.org). The side effects on these suspensions have lasting impacts on the students. When a student is suspended they miss essential class time, are left home for several days possibly unsupervised, as parents are required to work, and can have a negative stigma placed on their character affecting the perception school staff and their peers may have of them.

### **Contributing Factors**

Students of different ethnic backgrounds and those who do not have English as their first language experience conscious and unconscious bias against other students and staff. Bringing awareness to the negative effects of this discrimination will assist in developing a safer school climate. Teachers who have specific biases against a student may or may not be aware of their discrimination, however, this does not limit the negative impact experienced by students. This is one of many reasons it is critical that school staff ensure they are actively participating in

broadening their cultural knowledge. According to Bottiani, McDaniel, Henderson, Castillo, & Bradshaw in their 2020 article *Buffering Effects of Racial Discrimination on School Engagement: The Role of Culturally Responsive Teachers and Caring School Police*, interventions to promote school staffs' cultural responsiveness and caring can increase engagement among at-risk youth who experience discrimination.

Considering an alternative-to-suspensions or other means of correction is a newer concept within the systematic development within the school systems. Many administrators may be unaware of the alternative that can be provided for students, ensuring that when a student has done wrong their punishment does not affect their education, negatively affect their mental health or discourage a trusting relationship with school staff. Considering other means of correction is significantly important, especially when considering students of African American backgrounds receive 1.9% more expulsion than those of their caucasian classmates (Green, Ambra, Maynard, Deanna, & Stegenga, Sondra 2018).

Within the education system, it has only now become apparent that students need social emotional support to ensure they receive the best educational experience while participating in the K-12 education system. "Schools provide nearly 40% of all mental health treatment (other than medication) to children in the United States and often deliver preventive services designed to reduce the incidence of emotional and behavioral problems" (Meyers, A, Tobin, R, Huber, B, Conway, D, & Shelvin, K. 2015). With this in mind it is important that we consider the implications of having a deficiency of these services and the positive impact experienced through the services provided.

## Consequences

The School to Prison Pipeline has always been a controversial topic; it associates a student's disciplinary history with their increased odds of being incarcerated at least once in their lifetime. A negative association with school and experiences of disciplinary actions are a known antisocial turning point for students. This turning point has been associated with criminal histories, unemployment and family instability (Hemez P, Brent JJ, Mowen TJ). With students experiencing a negative personality adjustment at an influential and developmentally important time in their lives, it is not something that should be easily overlooked.

A lack of connection between suspended students and their educators can establish a negative correlation towards school and will reduce a child's desire to learn. If a student is suspended they are likely to experience suspension or expulsion again in their school career. High school graduation rates were found to be around 40% lower in students who have experienced a form of suspension or expulsion and 30% of those suspended have dropped out of high school when compared to their peers (Cobb-Clark, D., Kassenboehmer, S., Le, T., McVicar, D., & Zhang, 2015). Finding an alternative form of discipline that strays from the current punitive system can help to ensure that more students are graduating from high school and will prevent students from creating a negative correlation with their education.

Students who experience suspension and expulsion, experience the stigma of having the label as the “bad student” from both their peers and school staff. Students who face this type of negative stigmatization can feel a need to protect themselves with behaviors such as “interpersonal exclusion from normative others and to greater involvement with antisocial peers” (Jacobson, W. 2020). The development of these behaviors provides a clear insight into the

mindset and feelings of students experiencing disciplinary actions. The development of negative emotions towards the education system and their peers within the system will create a barrier for the students, making it difficult for staff and students to encourage positive behaviors.

### **Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Conscious and unconscious bias/discrimination against students.	Excessive use of suspension for students among Hispanic, African Americans and English learners.	Suspended students have an increased risk of incarceration later in life.
Administrators have a lack of knowledge on alternatives to suspension.		Negative impact on students' education.
Slow adjustments to social emotional development within the education system.		Students being stigmatized among staff and peers.

### **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

#### **Capstone Project**

Through the support of SUHSD's PPS department the capstone developed will be a reference list for Administrators, Administrative Secretaries and School Social Workers (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS), this form will be distributed at each school site to keep on hand when considering the suspension of a student. This reference list will consist of all alternative means of correction found in the California Education Code 48900.5, as well as, all allowable alternative means of correction found in SUHSD policies and regulations. This information will bring awareness among administrators and their staff of the current social emotional movement



throughout the Californian school districts and ensure the school district as a whole is moving away from the immediate suspension of students. This informational form will be distributed to each individual site, as well as, placed within the SUHSD policies, alongside an informative PowerPoint created by SUHSD lawyers to inform staff of alternative suspensions.

### **Project Purpose**

The purpose of this capstone project is to address the lack of knowledge some administrations and their staff may have on alternative means of correction and the positive effect it can have on the school environment as a whole. This project will ensure that all administrations are knowledgeable on all California legalities regarding suspensions and their districts contributions to supporting it. With this reference list being distributed alongside the informative PowerPoint on Alternative Means of Correction, Administrators and their support staff can easily access and distribute this information within the district to increase staff's knowledge and participation in focusing on a more positive correction of negative behavior.

### **Project Justification**

The importance of finding alternative means to suspension has been noticed more and more in the modern era. This is due to the negative impact suspension has on a student's education, social emotional health and developmental process. "... approximately 6% of students receive a suspension in a given year, about 50% of those students will experience an additional suspension the same year, and over 70% will experience at least one additional suspension..." (Green, A., Maynard, D., Stegenga, S. 2018). When a student is suspended it does not deter them from future negative behavior. Suspensions remove the feeling of a safe and accepting environment and causes previously suspended students to act out or misbehave. When a student

is in a safe environment to grow and properly adjust to their surroundings and the expected behaviors, it becomes easier for the student to correct their behavior.

The implementation of providing school administrators with a comparison chart will bring awareness to school sites, from the top down, of the alternative to suspensions that is approved in their district. It gives administrators and their schools a chance to make an informed decision and provide a safe environment for all involved. Attending a once a year seminar is not enough to ensure administrative staff will retain a complete understanding of what alternative to suspensions means for SUHSD throughout a busy academic year. According to Dawei. and Kai (2001) in, "The relationship between FOK judgments and the accessible information," those who base judgements on a strong "Feeling of Knowledge" or "FOK" correlate this with the strength of active information they receive. With having an easily accessible document, administrators are to have a constant reminder of the positive alternatives they can take as a form of disciplinary action.

### **Project Implementation**

A detailed comparison chart regarding the California Ed Code 48900.5 Alternatives to Suspension and SUHSD guidelines on Alternative Means of Correction, as well as attendance codes has been distributed to all administrative staff throughout the district. This information was carefully researched and collected through reliable resources. Before the implementation of this information, this form has been reviewed and refined several times by PPS Mentor Hayley Newman and SUHSD staff of lawyers to ensure all information is correct and concise. The comparison chart is intended to be a support form correlating with a PowerPoint presentation

created by SUHSD lawyers addressing Alternative Means of Correction and associated information.

All information from California Ed Code 48900.5 has been gathered and imputed into a draft comparison chart in April 2021. From May 2021 to July 2021 research into SUHSD's Alternative to Suspension was researched and a comparison chart (as seen on in Appendix B) has been updated and distributed to PPS Mentor Hayley Newman for corrections. In August 2021 the comparison chart was distributed to SUHSD lawyers who reviewed and critiqued the form with its final corrections before the final draft was distributed to the SUHSD lawyers for use. Between late September 2021 and early November 2021 the SUHSD lawyers created and presented the PowerPoint to all administrative staff and the above mentioned comparison chart has been distributed as a reference point. This information is expected to be reviewed yearly and distributed yearly, or as often as new administration is introduced to schools. A detailed explanation and timeline of the implementation of this project can be viewed in Appendix A.

### **Assessment Plan**

The effectiveness of the implementation of the comparison chart was evaluated alongside the PowerPoint presented by SUHSD lawyers. After the presentation on Alternatives to Suspension and the distribution of the comparison chart in September 2021, administrators, administrative secretaries and SSW/IS were given an evaluation form with several questions intended to gather their knowledge of the subject and how confident they are in implementing the Alternatives to Suspension approved for their district, as well as a Empathy Interview questions presented to administrators and administrative secretaries to determine the effectiveness of the flow of information when it comes to Alternative to Suspensions.. Each

administrator evaluated the effectiveness of the comparison chart and how often they felt they would reference this chart, as well as the information given during the presentation. Through gathering this data the importance of the comparison chart and the need for future use of this form will be determined.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The intention for creating a comparison chart related to Alternatives to Suspensions is to give administrators and their support staff an easy to understand and accessible reference. It is hoped that by having this reference in hand administrators and their support staff will no longer resort to the removal of a student from campus and consider other sources to correct a student's behavior. Increasing the awareness of the approved forms of alternatives for SUHSD will assist in providing a more positive and supporting environment for all students and staff involved. Providing this information to the administrators and their support staff will ensure that the school is focused on a positive approach to disciplinary action. Through the implementation of the evaluation there will be several questions asked in regards to the expected usage of this document throughout the school semester and the effectiveness of assisting in a positive school culture. The expected outcome is for 80% of administrators to expect to use this form throughout the school term and use this form as an assistance when referring to Alternatives to Suspension.

### **Project Results**

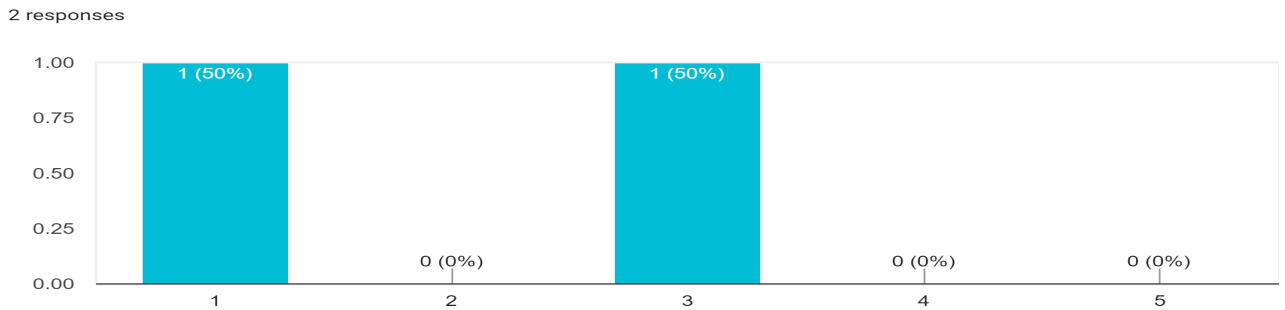
Salinas Union High School District (SUHSD) administrators were provided with the Alternative to Suspension Flow Chart as an assistance in their day to day work, ensuring an easily accessible document was available and reducing the lack of knowledge or confusion on the newly implemented programs designed to decrease suspension rate. The data collected

through the three different surveys distributed to Administrators, Administrative Secretaries and School Social Workers (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS) was used to determine the knowledge and understanding of Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction and to determine the accessibility of this information. While the complete understanding of the success of the Flow Chart has not yet been determined due to late implementation of training and distribution of files and the longevity of the project, an understanding of the knowledge received through Alternative to Suspension / Other means of Correction pre training and current availability of the Flow Chart can be determined.

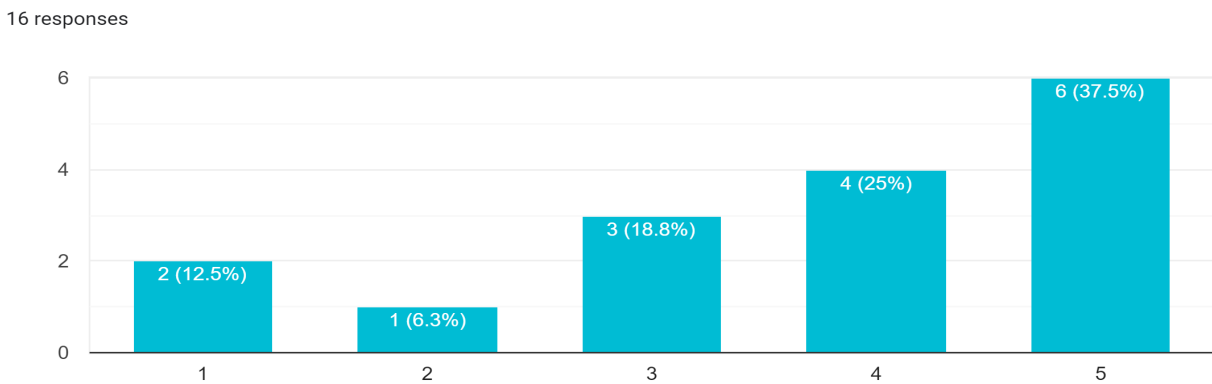
When determining the effectiveness and overall understanding of the implementation of Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction protocol among administrators it is important to note that only two administrators within the school district participated in the option survey. The data discussed for administration is limited. A broader group of Administrative Secretaries and SSW / IS participated in the optional survey. Although data collected for Administrators will be reviewed, the main focus of research will be centered on Administrative Secretaries and SSW / IN. All questions asked within the survey were not imputed into this paper, while this survey was directly associated with the Flow Chart implementation, some questions on the survey were directed towards other factors related to Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction. It is my recommendation that the Flow Chart be distributed yearly and as often as needed. I am making this recommendation based on the data collected through the surveys. Below is a detailed explanation of the data collected alongside a variety of charts used to better visualize the data collected through the implementation of the surveys.

**Question:** How Comfortable are you with using Alternatives to Suspension / Other Means of Correction? 1 = Very Comfortable, 5 = Not Comfortable At All

**Administrator Response:** 50% of respondents stated they were “Very Comfortable”, 50% of respondents stated they midway between “Very Comfortable” and “Not Comfortable At All”

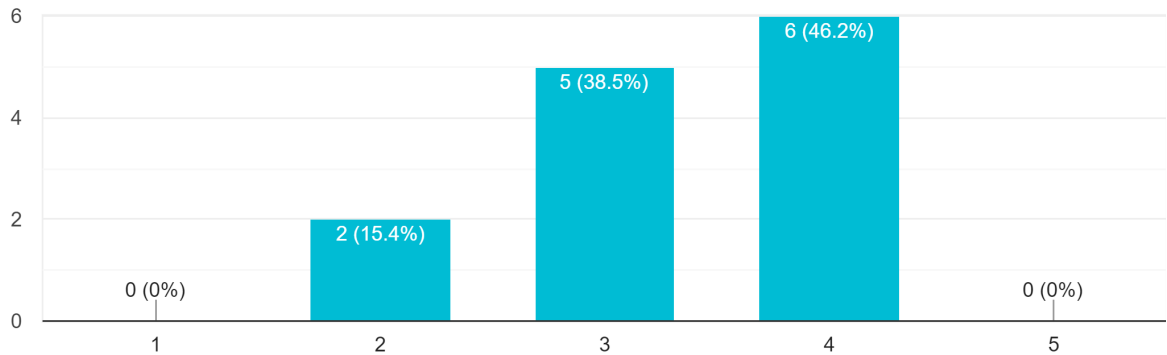


**Administrative Secretary Response:** 12.5% of respondents stated they are “Very Comfortable”, 50.1% of respondents stated they are in between “Very Comfortable” and Not Comfortable At All”, 37.5 % stated they are “Not Comfortable At All”



**School Social Worker (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS) Response:** 100% of respondents stated they are in between “Very Comfortable” and “Not Comfortable At All”

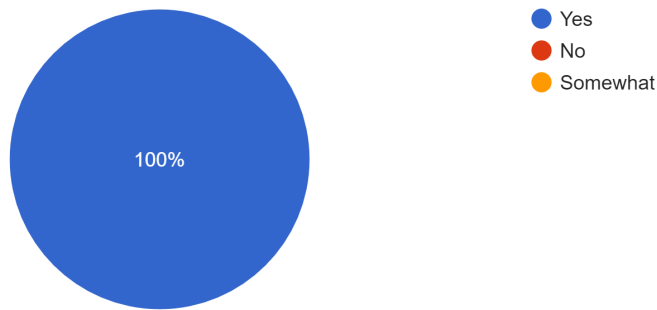
13 responses



**Question:** Do you know where or how to access the resources for Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction?

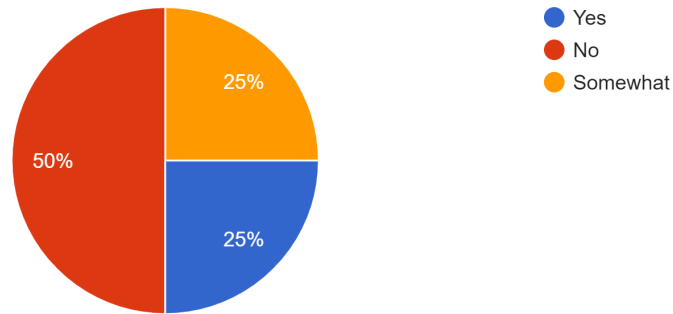
**Administrator Response:** 100% of respondents stated they know how to access the resources.

2 responses



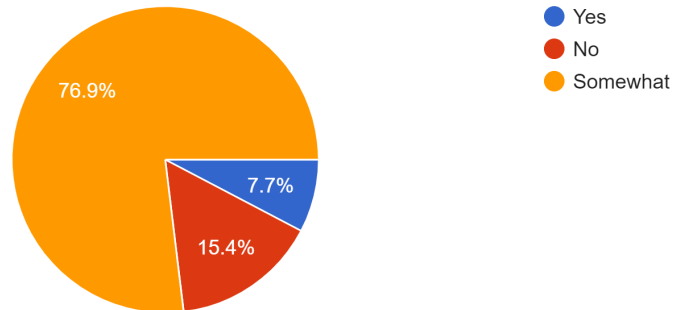
**Administrative Secretary Response:** 25% of respondents stated “Yes” they do know where to access these resources, 25% of respondents stated “No” they do not know where to access these resources, 50% of respondents stated they “Somewhat” know where to access these resources.

16 responses



**School Social Worker (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS) Response:** 7.7% of respondents stated “Yes” they do know where to access these resources, 15.4% of respondents stated “No” they do not know where to access these resources, 76.9% of respondents stated they “Somewhat” know where to access these resources.

13 responses

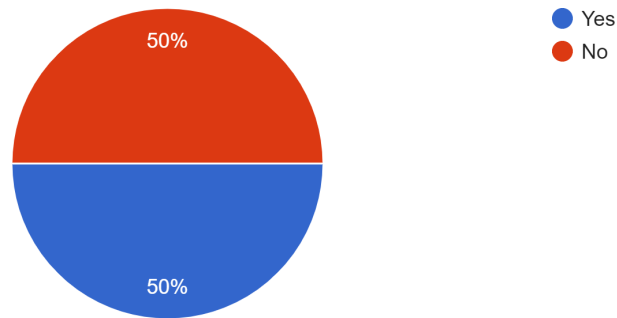


**Question:** Do you know what codes are required for each type of Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction?

**Administrator Response:** 50% of respondents stated they know what codes are required. 50% of respondents stated they do not know what codes are required

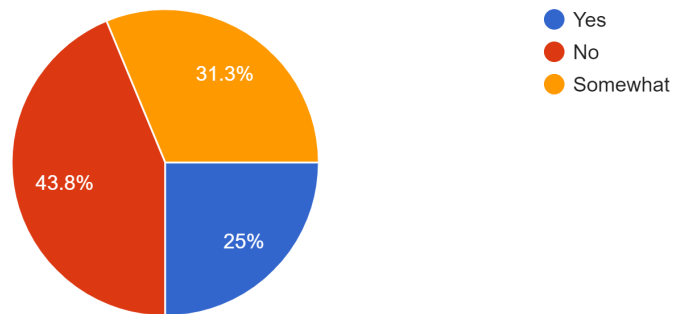


2 responses



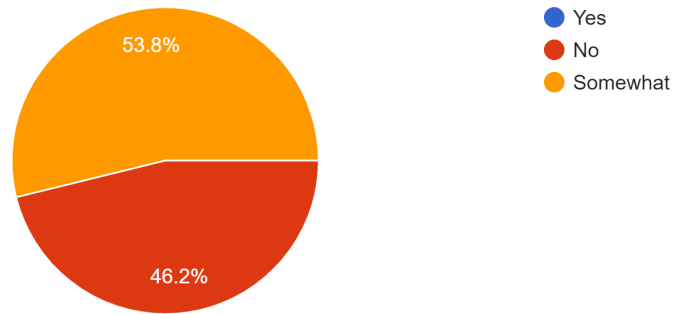
**Administrative Secretary Response:** 25% of respondents stated “Yes” they do know what codes to use, 43.8% of respondents stated “No” they do not know what codes to use, 31.3% stated they “Somewhat” know what codes to use.

16 responses



**School Social Worker (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS) Response:** 46.2% of respondents stated “No” they do not know what codes to use, 53.8% of respondents stated they “Somewhat” know what codes to use.

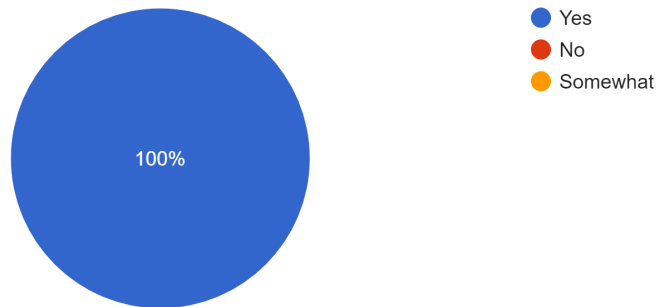
13 responses



**Question:** Would a centralized document or handbook with all information on Alternatives to Suspension / Other Means of Correction Ed Codes and Administrative Codes be a resource you would use often?

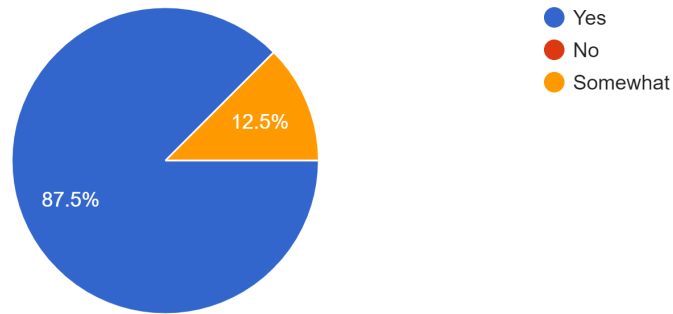
**Administrator Response:** 100% of respondents stated they would use this resource often.

2 responses



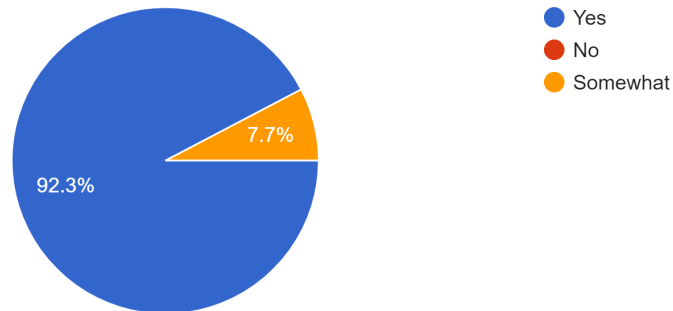
**Administrative Secretary Response:** 87.5% of respondents stated they would use this resource often, 12.5% of respondents stated they “Somewhat” use this resource often.

16 responses



**School Social Worker (SSW) / Intervention Specialist (IS) Response:** 92.3% of respondents stated “Yes” they would use this resource often, 7.7% of respondents stated they would “Somewhat” use this resource often.

13 responses



Along with the above questions each Administrator and Administrator Secretary had the option of completing Empathy Interview Questions. Each question was directed towards the communication received so far on Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction, how they would prefer to receive this information and their experiences when working with this new program. All Administrators opted out of this section of the questionnaire. Based on the information received from Administrator Secretaries it can be concluded that the distribution on

the Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction Flow Chart will be great assistance for this group of employees. Below are the questions asked of the Administrator Secretary and their most common responses.

**Question:** What has been your experience inputting data for Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Corrections?

**Administrator Secretary:** “To many places to input the same data”, “Input information in student conference notes”, “Secretaries have not been properly taught how to input Other Means of Correction information in the system”

**Question:** What has it been like receiving information on the implementation of Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction data protocols from SUHSD?

**Administrator Secretary:** “Very poor”, “Lack of communication”, “I had no idea what Alternative to Suspension was until I was told to draw up paperwork on it”, “Confusing, everyone gives different answers”

**Question:** How would you prefer SUHSD to communicate with you on information regarding Alternative to Suspension / Other Means of Correction?

**Administrator Secretary:** “Email”, “Training”, “Shared folder / drive with all required documentation”, “Anything at all”

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

It is my conclusion that through the creation of the Other Means of Correction / Alternative to Suspension flow chart, alongside the administrative training given by SUHSD lawyers in September 2021, SUHSD has seen a positive change in the mindsets of their school administrators. Although it is clear SUHSD has a long way to go to completely submerge their

entire school district into Other Means of Correction / Alternative to Suspension, the work they are currently doing has been successful. Throughout this process I have become more aware of the time frame it takes to implement a huge difference in a school district this size. It is not just giving a form to administrators and expecting the change to occur. There are trainings that need to be done, evaluations on the work created to ensure information is accessible and understood, recreation of programs to train staff, the creation of attendance codes to ensure the correct data is documented for California School Dashboard, as well as forms and training sent out to all credited and uncredited staff to ensure the entire school site is in a mutual understanding of the new regulations being put into place. This is not a change that can see a rapid result but is a necessary change that will provide a more accepting school environment.

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### Appendix A

#### Scope of Work

Activities	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Research and gather all information from California Ed Code 48900.5 / Create sample comparison chart	April 2021	Hayley Newman
Research and gather all SUHSD information on Alternative Means to Suspension / Update comparison chart	May 2021	Hayley Newman
Set up meetings to ensure all data is collected and form is correct	June 2021 - July 2021	Hayley Newman
Update comparison chart	July 2021 - August 2021	Hayley Newman
Introduce comparison chart to SUHSD Lawyers for review	August 2021	Hayley Newman / SUHSD Lawyers
Final update of comparison chart	August 2021 - September 2021	Hayley Newman / SUHSD Lawyers
Distribute finalized comparison chart to lawyers	Late August 2021 - Early September 2021	Hayley Newman / SUHSD Lawyers
Comparison chart distributed to administrators	September 2021 - November 2021	Hayley Newman / SUHSD Lawyers
Collection of data to review effectiveness and sustainability of comparison chart	Late November 2021 - Early December 2021	Hayley Newman / Administrators / SUHSD Lawyers
Creation of data spreadsheet and final determination of effectiveness and sustainability of comparison chart	December 2021	Hayley Newman

### Appendix B

#### Other Means of Correction for SUHSD

*California Ed Code 48900.5:* Suspension, including supervised suspension as described in Section 48911.1, shall be imposed only when other means of correction fail to bring about proper conduct. A school district may document the other means of correction used and place that documentation in the pupil's record, which may be accessed pursuant to Section 49069.7. However, a pupil, including an



individual with exceptional needs, as defined in Section 56026, may be suspended, subject to Section 1415 of Title 20 of the United States Code, for any of the reasons enumerated in Section 48900 upon a first offense, if the principal or superintendent of schools determines that the pupil violated subdivision (a), (b), (c), (d), or (e) of Section 48900 or that the pupil's presence causes a danger to persons.

<b>California Education Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Disposition Code</b>	<b>State Code</b>
<i>A conference between school personnel, the pupil's parent or guardian, and the pupil.</i>	Conference with parent/caregiver	CwP	300
<i>Referrals to the school counselor, psychologist, social worker, child welfare attendance personnel, or other school support service personnel for case management and counseling.</i>	Referred to student support staff or intervention	REF2	300
<i>Study teams, guidance teams, resource panel teams, or other intervention-related teams that assess the behavior, and develop and implement individualized plans to address the behavior in partnership with the pupil and the</i>	Referral to team SST, Tier 2-3, other Tier 3- Behavior Support Plan	TEAM BPS	300 300

<i>pupil's parents.</i>			
<i>Referral for a comprehensive psychosocial or psychoeducational assessment, including for purposes of creating an individualized education program, or a plan adopted pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794(a)).</i>	Referral for psychosocial/educational assess.	REF4	300
<i>Enrollment in a program for teaching prosocial behavior or anger management.</i>	Alt to Sus programming	PROG	300
<i>Participation in a restorative justice program.</i>	Restorative Justice program participation Community-Building Circle	RJ CIR	300 300
<i>A positive behavior support approach with tiered interventions that occur during the school day on campus.</i>	PBIS Intervention during day	PBIS	300
<i>After school programs that</i>	After-School School or	AS	300

<p><i>address specific behavioral issues or expose pupils to positive activities and behaviors, including, but not limited to, those operated in collaboration with local parent and community groups.</i></p>	<p>Community Program Saturday School with Behavior Related Assignment Community-Building Circle</p>	<p>Sat Det CIR</p>	<p>300 300</p>
<p><i>Any of the alternatives described in Section 48900.6.</i></p> <p>❖ <i>As part of or instead of disciplinary action prescribed by this article, the principal of a school, the principal's designee, the superintendent of schools, or the governing board may require a pupil to perform community service on school grounds or, with written permission of the parent or guardian of the pupil, off school grounds,</i></p>	<p>Community service</p>	<p>COMM</p>	<p>300</p>

<p>during the pupil's nonschool hours. For the purposes of this section, "community service" may include, but is not limited to, work performed in the community or on school grounds in the areas of outdoor beautification, community or campus betterment, and teacher, peer, or youth assistance programs. This section does not apply if a pupil has been suspended, pending expulsion, pursuant to Section 48915. However, this section applies if the recommended expulsion is not implemented or is, itself, suspended by</p>			
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<i>stipulation or other administrative action.</i>			
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