

Excellence in Prevention – descriptions of the prevention programs and strategies with the greatest evidence of success

Name of Program/Strategy: School Policies

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1. Overview and description

School policies are formal regulations which provide for sanctions against youth for the possession of alcohol on school property. The penalties are usually a part of school policies which ban or provide restrictions for possession or provision of alcohol on school property. Many schools are adopting zero-tolerance policies. These policies mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for specific serious student infractions. The vast majority of elementary and secondary schools have alcohol-related policies and the majority of schools have adopted zero tolerance policies. When alcohol violations are detected, suspension and expulsion are the typical responses. However, it is presently unknown what effect, if any, school sanctions have on the prevalence of underage drinking either at the individual or school population levels, whether schools are an appropriate venue for addressing this behavior, or, when compared to other possible venues, whether schools are better, worse, or equally effective in deterring or modifying this behavior.

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Although the research on the topic is limited, there are some inferences that can be drawn about efforts to deter underage drinking. For example, all states and a number of municipalities have some type of prohibition against youth drinking, although these prohibitions vary from state to state. The nature and severity of the sanctions associated with violations of these prohibitions vary considerably across jurisdictions. It is also apparent that for a variety of reasons, enforcement of these laws is relatively sporadic and inconsistent. In addition, although all schools in this country have an alcohol policy, these policies also vary considerably.

2. Implementation considerations (if available)

3. Descriptive information

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Areas of Interest | Substance abuse prevention |
| Outcomes | |
| Outcome Categories | Alcohol |
| Ages | |
| Gender | Male Female |
| Races/Ethnicities | American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino White Race/ethnicity unspecified |
| Settings | |
| Geographic Locations | Urban Suburban Rural and/or frontier Tribal |
| Implementation History | |
| NIH Funding/CER Studies | |
| Adaptations | |

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|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Adverse Effects | |
| IOM Prevention Categories | Universal |

4. Outcomes

Scientific Evidence

A large majority (87 percent) of public schools report having zero-tolerance policies for alcohol violations (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). Such policies are popular among schools such that nearly half of elementary, middle/junior high, and senior high schools in the U.S. have explicit policies prohibiting alcohol use on campus and at school functions and, in some cases, any possession of alcohol by students (Modzeleski, Small, & Kann, 1999).

When alcohol policies are violated, a common response is suspension or expulsion, a response that may be dictated by state law (see, e.g., HAW. REV. STAT. § 302A-1134.6 [2002]).

A national survey of school principals asked about their responses to undesirable behavior (Gottfredson et al., 2000). Some consistency across grade levels was found in the rates of suspension and expulsion exclusively for alcohol infractions.

According to elementary school principals surveyed, for alcohol policy violations, 65.4 percent of the principals reported that their students are automatically suspended or expelled, while 24.2 percent of the principals said their students receive a hearing, but this hearing usually results in suspension or expulsion.

For middle schools, 74 percent of the principals said that when alcohol policy violations occur, students violating the policies are automatically suspended or expelled, and another 23 percent of the principals said their students are usually suspended or expelled after a hearing.

For high school, 67.5 percent of the principals surveyed said students violating alcohol policies are automatically suspended or expelled, and another 24 percent are usually suspended or expelled after a hearing for an alcohol policy violation.

Other studies that have not focused exclusively on alcohol use report similar findings (Heaviside et al., 1998). When asked to report on the number of expulsions, transfers to alternative schools, and out-of-school suspensions lasting five or more days for possession, distribution, or use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, 27 percent of all school principals surveyed reported taking a total of about 170,000 disciplinary actions for these offenses, and of these actions, 62 percent of the disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions lasting five days or longer, 20 percent were transfers to alternative schools or programs, and 18 percent were expulsions.

Clearly, suspension was the most common response to substance-related problems in schools.

Other responses to violations of school alcohol policy include involving law enforcement in some way. For example, in some states, school officials either may or must inform local law enforcement of such violations.

Studies have not been conducted of the effectiveness of this approach.

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- 5. **Cost effectiveness report (Washington State Institute of Public Policy – if available)**
- 6. **Washington State results (from Performance Based Prevention System (PBPS) – if available)**
- 7. **Who is using this program/strategy**

| Washington Counties | Oregon Counties |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| | |

8. Study populations

9. Quality of studies

The documents below were reviewed for Quality of Research. The research point of contact can provide information regarding the studies reviewed and the availability of additional materials, including those from more recent studies that may have been conducted.

References

Gottfredson, G. D., Gottfredson, D. C., Czeh, R. R., Cantor, D., Cross, S. B., & Hantman, I. (2000). Summary: National study of delinquency prevention in schools. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Graves, K. (1993). Evaluation of the alcohol warning label: A comparison of the United States and Ontario, Canada in 1990 and 1991. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 12(1), 19-29.

Heaviside, S., Rowand, C., Williams, C., & Farris, E. (1998, March). Violence and discipline problems in U.S. public schools: 1996-1997. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Modzeleski, W., Small, M. L., & Kann, L. (1999). Alcohol and other drug prevention policies and education in the United States. *Journal of Health Education*, 30(Suppl. 5), S42-S49.

10. Readiness for Dissemination

11. Costs (if available)

12. Contacts