

Using Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate *Second Step: Skills for Social and Academic Success* and *Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program*



Committee for Children is a nonprofit organization whose programs are taught in more than 25,000 schools across North America and 26 countries throughout the world.



The *Second Step* curriculum is a research-based program for preschool through middle school that teaches children social and emotional skills to improve their success in school and throughout their lives.



The *Steps to Respect* program is a research-based, schoolwide bullying prevention program that teaches adults to deal effectively with incidents of school bullying and harassment while teaching children social skills to prevent bullying.

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Introduction

Discipline referral data can be a useful source of information for conducting needs assessment, process evaluation, and outcome evaluation of both the *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect* programs.

This document provides guidance in designing a discipline referral form and outlines data analysis procedures and interpretation. An example of using discipline referral data in needs assessment and outcome evaluation follows. Since there is no “one size fits all” in program evaluation, these are meant as suggestions to use in ways that best meet your evaluation needs.

Many schools already have some type of discipline referral system in place. Your existing system may be suitable for evaluation purposes as is, or you may need to modify it according to some of the suggestions in this document.

Additional help can be obtained by consulting “Guiding Principles for Evaluators” developed by the American Evaluation Association, available on their Web site at www.eval.org.

Data Collection

Designing a Discipline Referral Form

A major component of a discipline referral system is the discipline referral form. Thoughtful design of the discipline referral form is crucial, since it provides the documentation and data for your evaluation. Most discipline referral forms include information about “Who, What, When, Where, and How.”

The “Who” and “What” sections of the discipline referral form are most closely tied to outcome evaluation. Prevention outcomes are usually associated with desired changes in “who” is involved in discipline referrals and in “what” types of behavior are being referred.

The “When,” “Where,” and “How” sections of the discipline referral form are most closely tied to process evaluation. They can help you assess which program efforts are paying off and identify other changes you need to make in order to influence changes in outcomes.

Descriptions of the types of information commonly collected for each of the five sections follow. This list is not exhaustive. The amount of detail

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you request depends on your evaluation goals and school, district, and state needs. Most schools have to balance their desire for more information with practical considerations regarding ease of reporting and analysis.

Who

The “Who” section of a discipline referral form may be used for identification of:

- The individual (student) responsible for the incident
- The individual who made the referral
- Any incident victims

Information collected about the individual responsible for the incident may include the individual’s name, identification number, grade level, homeroom teacher, and characteristics (for example, gender, ethnicity, or special education status). Identification numbers enable you to keep information about individuals confidential.

Options: Information about incident victims may also be collected, such as who the victim was (for example, student, teacher, administrator, other school staff, police, or nonschool personnel). If you wish to track the number of incidents aimed at a particular individual—such as someone repeatedly targeted for bullying—use identification numbers for confidentiality.

What

The “What” section describes the type of incident or behavior that led to the referral. Your categories should include common discipline problems, such as fighting; behaviors that your district or state requires you to report, such as harassment/bullying; and behaviors that you hope to change with your prevention efforts, such as disruptive behavior. Some of these categories may overlap.

Options: The severity of each incident may be documented by differentiating major and minor incidents or by using a rating system to rate the severity of the behavior. This can improve your ability to interpret the data. For example, a school with a lot of minor incidents would likely approach prevention efforts differently than one with a lot of major incidents. Similarly, when comparing referral incidents across years, the number of referral incidents alone could be misleading if the severity of incidents also changes.

When and Where

The “When” section includes the referral date and time of the incident. Typical categories are class time, after school, before school, recess, and lunch.

The “Where” section tracks the exact place the incident occurred. Typical location categories are school-sponsored off-campus activity, school-sponsored transportation, classroom, cafeteria, hallway, playground, bus area, or gym. By knowing where and when your problems are most likely to occur, you can make informed decisions regarding monitoring and other preventive efforts.

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How

The “How” section of the discipline referral form describes the consequences of the discipline referral, or the disciplinary actions. In other words, “how” the incident or behavior was dealt with. These should be aligned with school and district-level discipline policy and procedures.

Options: Other information collected in this section may include the date of the disciplinary action and information about previous disciplinary actions taken. Estimates of administrative time spent with disciplinary actions can be documented in this section as well (see Butterfield, Muse, and Anderson, 1996).

Collecting Accurate and Consistent Data

Two things that will increase the accuracy and consistency of data collected are understanding of and buy-in to the system by those who will use it. To promote understanding and buy-in:

- Involve those who will report discipline referrals (teachers, school staff) in the development of the discipline referral system
- Provide written discipline referral system procedures, including definitions of terms and categories used on the discipline referral form, with examples of accurate and inaccurate interpretations
- Provide a written plan for managing the discipline referral system, including who is responsible for referral tasks such as reporting, recording, and data entry
- Provide training to those who will report discipline referrals
- Make sure the system is as easy to use as possible
- Revisit the system regularly to assess its functioning and make changes as needed
- Demonstrate the importance of the referral data by reporting the results to those making referrals and using results to inform decision making

Careful planning, training, and monitoring can help ensure that data collection is accurate and consistent throughout the school year. Questions regarding the accuracy and consistency of data collected include:

- Do staff members follow discipline referral procedures accurately? Do they implement procedures the same way for all students?
- Do staff members interpret discipline referral form terms and categories accurately? Do they interpret them the same way for all students?
- Do staff members complete all discipline referral form sections and items accurately?

If you use discipline referral data that was originally collected for purposes other than program evaluation, investigate the validity of the data by checking such things as the accuracy of totals and completeness of data. You can also informally interview those who were involved in the data collection process to determine their perceptions of its validity.

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Data Analysis Procedures and Results

Summarize discipline referral data using descriptive statistics such as totals, percentages, and means. This summarizing, or data analysis, allows large amounts of data to be condensed into meaningful information that can be used to determine progress and inform future programming. For your summary, present the most informative data, describing the results and how you analyzed the data. Tables and graphs can highlight the most important results and make comparisons or patterns clearer. Include a brief explanation of the visual presentation in the narrative to avoid misreading of results by the evaluation audience.

Comparisons of referral data collected before program implementation with those collected afterward are helpful in detecting program outcomes, particularly if intervention schools can be compared with control schools. Analyses that test for statistical significance are an option if you have an evaluator who understands inferential statistics and their interpretation. Otherwise, it is better to use descriptive statistics, which are easier to interpret and more meaningful to nonresearcher audiences.

Interpretation

The goal of data interpretation is to determine the meaning of your data analysis. Interpretation of discipline referral data should be undertaken in light of the other indicators you have chosen to measure when performing outcome evaluation. If the targeted categories of your discipline referrals show consistent decreases, and this is in agreement with other outcome indicators, interpretation is straightforward—the outcome has been achieved. If some of your targeted categories decrease and others do not, information from other data sources (such as implementation data) can aid interpretation and help you formulate your next steps.

Be aware that pre- and post-intervention data is not always comparable since program implementation may result in increased awareness and monitoring of target behaviors. This may be especially true for covert behaviors, such as bullying, that are seldom reported to adults. A basic goal of the *Steps to Respect* program is to increase student reporting and adult responsiveness. You may find that bullying referrals increase over the first year of *Steps to Respect* implementation, which could indicate an increase in reporting rather than an increase in bullying.

Program Evaluation

Before program implementation, it is important to establish need, which can be guided by discipline referral data. In turn, this needs assessment can help guide program evaluation. This section will focus on one of the needs identified at Main Street School and how it was used as an outcome for evaluation.

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Needs Assessment

After looking at overall discipline referral numbers for the year (see Table 1), Main Street School staff looked at data for each category (see Table 2). The largest number of discipline referrals was for fighting (81 referrals; 29 percent of all referrals), followed by classroom-disruptive behavior (48 referrals; 17 percent of all referrals). Data from teacher interviews and parent surveys used as part of the needs assessment confirmed disruptive behavior and fighting as primary concerns.

Table 1

| Total Discipline Referrals: Baseline Year ¹ | | |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|
| School Days | Discipline Referrals | Mean Referrals Per Day |
| 181 | 283 | 1.56 ² |

¹ The term “baseline” refers to data collected before program implementation. In this example, baseline data are from the year before *Second Step* program implementation.

² “Mean referrals per day” was computed by dividing the number of school days by the number of referrals.

Table 2

| Discipline Referrals by Category (Major Incident): Baseline Year | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Referral Category | Baseline |
| Classroom-disruptive behavior | 48 (17%) ¹ |
| Harassment/bullying | 16 (6%) |
| Insubordination | 24 (8%) |
| Inappropriate/profane/abusive language | 25 (9%) |
| Fighting | 81 (29%) |
| Vandalism | 17 (6%) |
| Stealing | 9 (3%) |
| Possession/use of tobacco | 39 (14%) |
| Possession/use of alcohol | 18 (6%) |
| Possession/use of a weapon | 3 (1%) |
| Sexual assault | 0 (0%) |
| Other | 3 (1%) |

¹ Percentage was computed by dividing number of referrals for disruptive behavior by total referrals.

In addition, the staff discovered that 29 percent of students were referred for discipline problems (see Table 3). The staff voiced concern about the severity of fighting and about instructional time lost due to classroom disruptions and came up with the following need statement.

Need Statement: *Decrease fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior among students.*



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Given this and other needs assessment findings, Main Street School decided to implement a schoolwide universal prevention program beginning the following school year. The staff researched programs and decided that the *Second Step* program most closely aligned with their needs and anticipated outcomes.

Table 3

| Students Referred for Discipline Incidents Part I: Baseline Year | | |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Number of Students Enrolled | Students Referred | Students Not Referred |
| 500 | 144 (29%) ¹ | 356 (71%) |

¹ Percentage was computed by dividing number of students referred by the number of students enrolled.

Outcome Evaluation

Before program implementation, Main Street School staff planned an outcome evaluation based on their need statement. As part of evaluation planning, staff identified several outcome indicators. For each indicator, data collection methods, data collection arrangements, and data analysis procedures were identified. The plan for Outcome 1—Indicator A appears in italics below.

Need Statement: Decrease fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior among students.

1. Outcome: Students decrease fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior.

A. Indicator: Discipline referrals for fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior decrease following the second year of Second Step implementation.

Data Collection Method: Discipline referral system.

Data Collection Arrangements: Assistant principal provides discipline referral data to the evaluation team monthly.

Data Analysis Procedures: Frequencies and percentages for fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior referrals from baseline and first-year implementation are compared to frequencies and percentages for fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior referrals from second-year implementation.

Data Analysis Results

After the second year of program implementation, Main Street School reported the following results for Outcome 1—Indicator A, based on discipline referral data.

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Discipline referrals for fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior decreased following the first and second years of *Second Step* implementation (see Table 4). Discipline referrals for fighting decreased from 81 to 64 (change = 17) following the first year of implementation, and to 50 referrals following the second year of implementation (change from baseline = 31; change from year two = 14).

Discipline referrals for classroom-disruptive behavior decreased from 48 to 40 referrals (change = 8) following the first year of implementation, and to 30 referrals following the second year of implementation (change from baseline = 18; change from the second year = 10).

Table 4

| Discipline Referrals by Category (Major Incident): Yearly Comparison | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Referral Category | Baseline | Year 1 | Year 2 |
| Classroom-disruptive behavior | 48 | 40 | 30 |
| Harassment/bullying | 16 | 20 | 15 |
| Insubordination | 24 | 20 | 17 |
| Inappropriate/profane/abusive language | 25 | 22 | 26 |
| Fighting | 81 | 64 | 50 |
| Vandalism | 17 | 12 | 15 |
| Stealing | 9 | 7 | 6 |
| Possession/use of tobacco | 39 | 32 | 29 |
| Possession/use of alcohol | 18 | 20 | 17 |
| Possession/use of a weapon | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Sexual assault | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Total Discipline Referrals | 283 | 241 | 209 |
| Mean Number of Discipline Referrals | 1.56 | 1.33 | 1.15 |

Notes:

1. With the same number of school days each year, comparisons can be made across yearly totals alone.
2. If percentages were computed for each category based on yearly totals, the resulting percentage would not be comparable across years, because the total number of referrals differs each year.

Interpretation and Use

With outcome evaluation, the first level of interpretation is whether—and the degree to which—program outcomes have been achieved. Because all data have some error, additional indicators increase the validity of evaluation results. Main Street School used teacher interviews as one additional indicator. Since the interviews showed a similar pattern of decreases in fighting and classroom-disruptive behavior to that of Indicator A, Main Street School determined that Outcome 1 was successfully achieved.



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They further determined that this success was likely due to:

- Full and quality implementation of the *Second Step* program, including Following Through activities and lesson activities.
- Increased playground monitoring by trained adults (evidenced by discipline referral data collected with the “Where” section of the referral form, which showed a decrease for fighting on the playground)

Main Street School used these evaluation findings to make decisions about programming and resource allocation for the upcoming school year. Based on the findings for Outcome 1, they decided to:

- Continue full and quality implementation of the *Second Step* program
- Provide *Second Step* training to playground monitors

Discipline referral data can help with many stages of program implementation, from choosing a relevant program to evaluating its outcomes. Ongoing evaluation of your implementation process and program results will enable you to monitor and improve your school’s performance continuously.

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