

Charles County Bucks Statewide Increase in School Suspensions

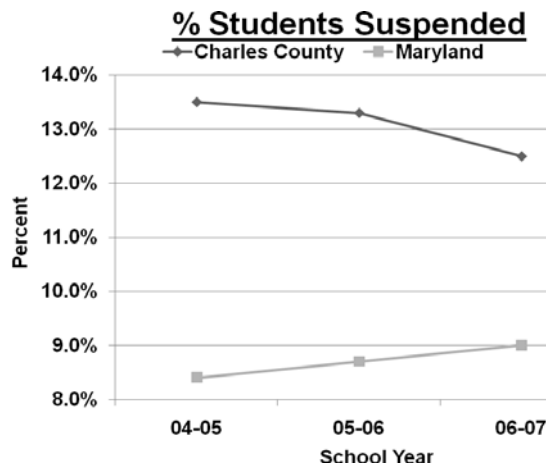
Key Factor Is Use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Executive Summary

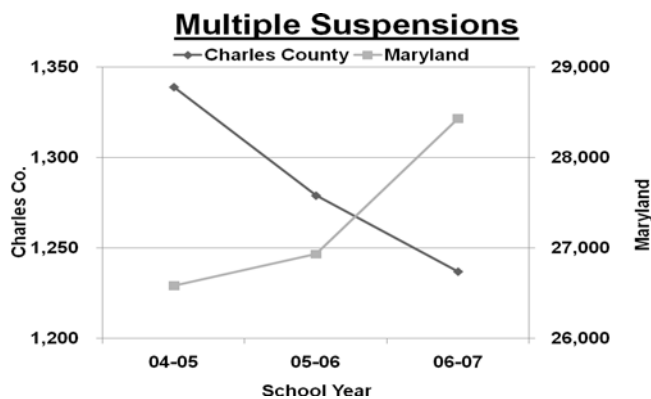
School suspensions have increased in Maryland. The number of students receiving multiple suspensions has also risen. In Charles County, however, suspensions and multiple suspensions have decreased as the county has widely implemented universal and targeted Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), an alternative approach to school suspensions. Maryland should provide funding and technical assistance to help other jurisdictions implement the full continuum of PBIS supports in their schools.

Maryland Suspensions

The percent of students suspended in Maryland reached the second highest level on record in the 2006-7 school year. In contrast, Charles County has seen several years of decline in suspensions.



Charles County also has a decreased number of multiple suspensions, bucking the statewide trend.



Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

PBIS in Charles County

PBIS is a proactive, school-wide approach to behavior management that focuses on teaching and supporting positive behavior in the entire student body. Charles County has implemented PBIS in 85 percent of its 35 schools. Many schools have also added more targeted supports for students who are at risk of being suspended. The county has a full-time PBIS coordinator to help support schools and expand this promising program.

PBIS Reduces problem behavior and suspensions

PBIS reduces the frequency and intensity of misbehavior by providing students with examples of positive replacement behaviors. After the implementation of PBIS, most schools report a decrease in problem behavior, fewer office referrals, an increase in positive social skills, improved overall academic achievement and an increase in classroom instruction time.

PBIS: A continuum of supports for different levels of problem behavior

Universal support, provided to all students, is generally effective in managing the 80 to 90 percent of students without serious behavior problems. This is the level of support that the majority of Maryland schools have in place.

More targeted group support is provided to the 5 to 15 percent of students at risk for frequent problem behavior. For example, about a dozen Charles County schools have implemented a Behavior Education Program (BEP) known as *Check In, Check Out*, which provides selected students with rapid response, regular feedback on behavior. A coordinator checks in with students at least twice a day, reviewing behavior progress reports from teachers and rewarding students for consistent positive check-ins.

Individualized support is provided to the 5 percent of students with intense problem behavior. These are the students most likely to be suspended multiple times. Functional Behavior Assessments are used to create individualized behavioral support plans. Wraparound



services and mental health supports are often included at this level.

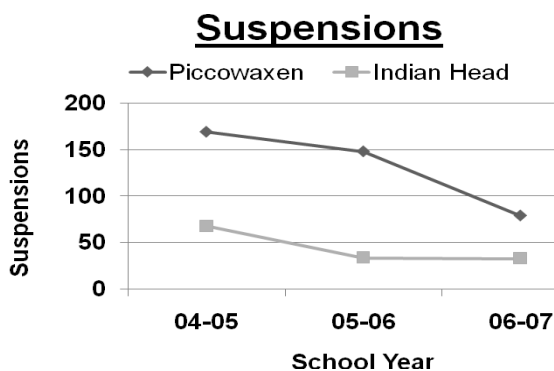
Findings

Lessons from Charles County

Advocates for Children and Youth spoke with principals and PBIS coordinators at several Charles County schools with “Exemplar” PBIS programs to learn more about successful PBIS programs. These schools have received recognition for implementation fidelity.

Principal Toni Melton-Trainor explained that Indian Head Elementary had struggled with frequent suspensions, office referrals and low teacher morale. Since implementing universal PBIS in 2004-5 and *Check In, Check Out* in 2005-6, suspensions have been cut in half and the morale of the school has improved. She said that group supports through a *Check In, Check Out* program made the biggest difference in her students’ ability to thrive.

Piccowaxen Middle School Principal Kenneth Schroek also saw suspensions fall as the school implemented PBIS--from almost 170 in 2005-6 to approximately 40 in 2007-8. Piccowaxen PBIS Coordinator Wendie Newcamp cited the example of a student who was frequently suspended, doing poorly in school and receiving negative attention from teachers. As the PBIS program became more established, this student avoided suspensions and began to make special trips to the office to show off his PBIS “Picco Paws” progress reports and rewards.



Matthew Henson Middle School uses the highest level of PBIS, individualized supports, to help students transition from an alternative school to mainstream Henson classrooms. Former Henson PBIS Coordinator Lynne Weise thinks the best aspect of PBIS is that it allows everyone in the school to do what they are supposed to do – students are in class

instead of being suspended, fewer students are retained, and teachers are able to teach instead of accompanying students to the office.

Staff cited the following elements as critical to Charles County’s success:

- Successful school-wide program in place before implementing more individualized supports;
- Frequent, quality trainings for as many staff as possible, especially when adding higher levels of supports;
- Support and technical assistance from Sheppard Pratt and the Maryland State Department of Education to learn how to implement programs successfully;
- Full staff buy-in and involvement in planning the program;
- Close attention to data to adapt programs as needed;
- Connections with community resources, such as Tri-County Youth Services which helps provide group and individual counseling in Charles County schools;
- An active Student Support Team that manages the referral process for *Check In, Check Out* and other higher level supports;
- A supportive countywide structure; and
- Frequent recognition of students.

Discussion and Recommendations

Maryland is a leader in establishing universal-level PBIS programs statewide, yet there is still work to be done. Schools need technical assistance and funding to implement higher levels of PBIS supports. Charles County’s results show how suspensions can be reduced with well-implemented, well-supported PBIS programs. Effective, full-scale implementation of PBIS at all levels will help reduce the number of students receiving more than one suspension in a year.

As a candidate, Governor O’Malley proposed to expand PBIS statewide. Advocates for Children and Youth recommends that the Governor and Maryland legislators redirect existing state funding for technical assistance to expand PBIS to more schools and help schools implement higher levels of supports. Expansion of PBIS can help reduce suspensions, increase instructional time, and increase student achievement.