

Proposed Definition of School-Based Diversion (SBD)



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Objective:

To collaboratively construct a definition of school-based diversion by effectively engaging community partners. This definition will serve as an essential touchstone for the 2019-2021 Connecticut Georgetown Capstone Project.

Proposed Definition:

School-based diversion (SBD) is a mindset, commitment, and practice that diverts students with diverse experiences and backgrounds from systems of exclusionary and punitive discipline (e.g., suspension, expulsion, and arrest)—where school personnel steer students toward positive youth development programming and promote a positive climate within and beyond the school. This work requires reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the educational and justice systems. Overall, SBD is best achieved when school personnel collaborate with partners—particularly, students, parents, and police—and steer disciplinary decision-making toward responsive and inclusive practices to meet the needs of all students.

Overview of the Georgetown Capstone Project:

In the fall of 2018, an interagency team from organizations across the state of Connecticut and led by Tow Youth Justice Institute staff participated in the Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform Certificate Program in School-Justice Partnerships and Diversion Pathways. Subsequently, this six organization team developed a two-year, multi-step Capstone project with the goal to support school-based diversion in the state of Connecticut. The first task of the Capstone project is an inventory of current school-based diversion practices in the state, and requires an operational definition of school-based diversion.

The Georgetown Capstone team approached the Diversion Workgroup of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee in the spring of 2019 to request such a definition. The Diversion Workgroup's 2019-2021 Work Plan includes the creation of "a standard definition for 'Diversion'" and to "map and identify what diversion programs, strategies, and interventions exist within communities." After discussions between the Diversion Workgroup and the Tow Youth Justice Institute staff, it was determined that during the summer of 2019 a School-Based Diversion Sub-group would be created to assist the Georgetown Capstone team in defining "school-based diversion."

Before convening the School-Based Diversion Sub-group, the Georgetown Capstone project lead Devon McCormick and graduate assistance Alison Oliver, with support from TYJI Research, Director Dr. Danielle Cooper, conducted an initial review of the relevant literature and online materials related to school-based diversion. They were unable to identify a consistent definition within the field.

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Definition Development Process:

On July 2nd, 2019, the School-based Diversion Sub-group met to develop a definition of school-based diversion. The meeting, conducted in through a Restorative Justice approach, facilitated dialogue on:

1. What is Diversion in general, from your perspective?
2. What is **School-Based** Diversion, from your perspective?
3. Are there any programs or practices that you know about happening in CT that you think qualify as school-based diversion?
4. Are there any criteria that either automatically include or exclude work from school-based diversion? (ex: diversion happening out in the community by police is not SBD, because it is not happening on school grounds)
5. Is there anyone else we should ask these questions to?

The information provided by the members of the sub-group was an important first step in defining school-based diversion, but also necessitated conversations with other key stakeholders in developing this definition. A small interview study, designed by lead investigator Dr. Danielle Cooper and co-investigator Devon McCormick, was conducted by TYJI student researchers during the months of July and August, 2019. Twenty-one total interviews were attempted, with 15 successfully conducted. Questions were developed from the initial Restorative Process used in the first School-based Diversion Sub-group meeting, and assisted researchers in identifying qualities and characteristics of both school-based diversion and community diversion. Upon completing the research study, the information gleaned from the interviews was compiled and synthesized by the TYJI research team, resulting in a draft definition of school-based diversion.

On August 15th, 2019, the School-based Diversion Sub-group of the JJPOC's Diversion Workgroup met for a 2nd time to review and edit the draft school-based diversion definition. Using the Restorative Circle methodology, Devon McCormick facilitated a conversation to determine what liked about the definition and what recommendations were for change. Following the facilitated review of the draft definition, Dr. Danielle Cooper moderated a discussion of the recommended edits to the draft definition with attendees.

The TYJI research team met on August 21st, 2019 to incorporate the changes provided by the sub-group into the final definition. This definition will be used to create a Connecticut School-Based Diversion Inventory of practices happening in Middle and High Schools across the state.

Acknowledgements:

This work was made possible through an intentionally collaborative process. We wish to thank those who participated in our phone interviews; your feedback greatly informed the development of this definition. Thank you also to School-based Diversion Sub-group members and TYJI researchers for contributing to the drafting and revising of this definition.