



What can District Leaders do to Address Challenging Behaviors?

CAPPS Spring Conference

March 2026



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SUPERINTENDENT

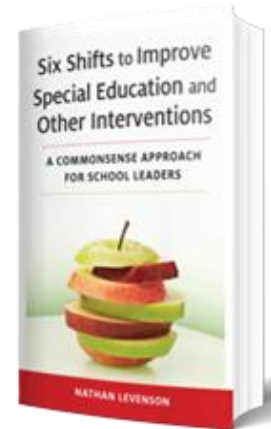
Developed best in class behavior programs

CONSULTANT

Served over 400 districts in over 30 states
Bold yet practical

AUTHOR

6 books and 50+ whitepapers and articles



Students today are bringing increasing challenges to school

- Disruptive Behaviors
- Apathy
- Stress and Anxiety
- Traumatic Pasts
- Loneliness
- Violence
- Cultural Isolation



DISCUSSION

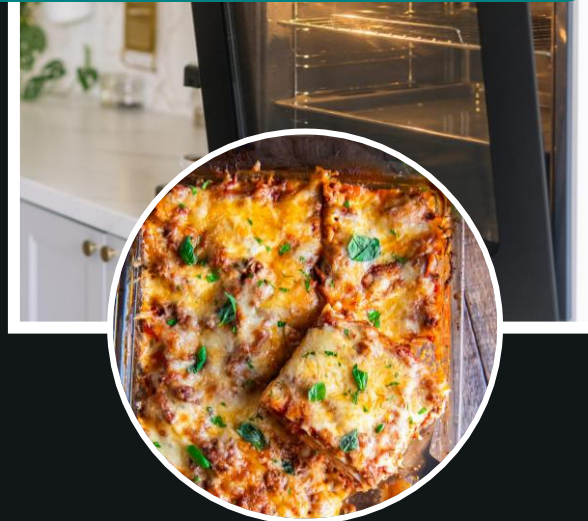
- 1. What are the most pressing behavior challenges in your district?**
- 2. How well are current efforts working?**

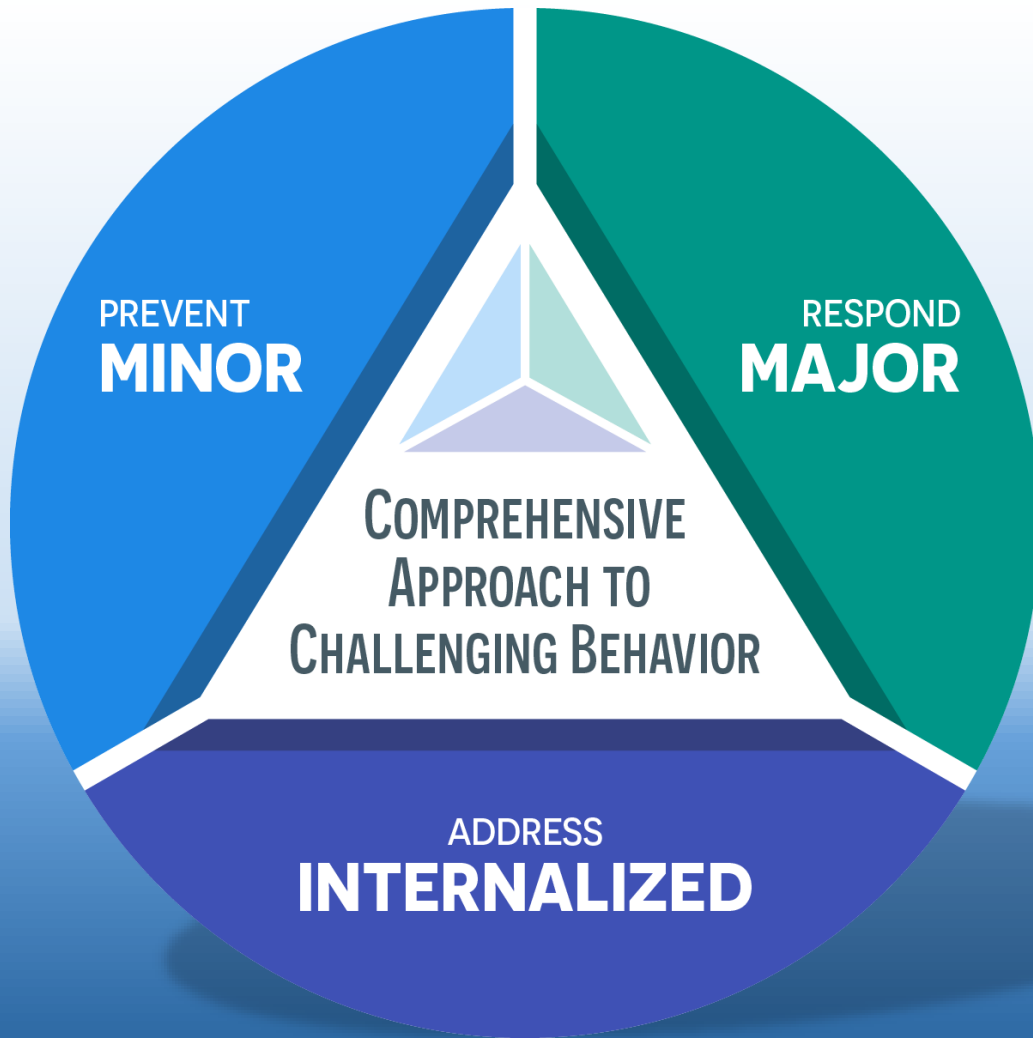
What is the best method to cook dinner?



It depends on what you are cooking.

Different types of students with challenging behavior will need different solutions





Prevent Minor Behavior
Before it Becomes Major

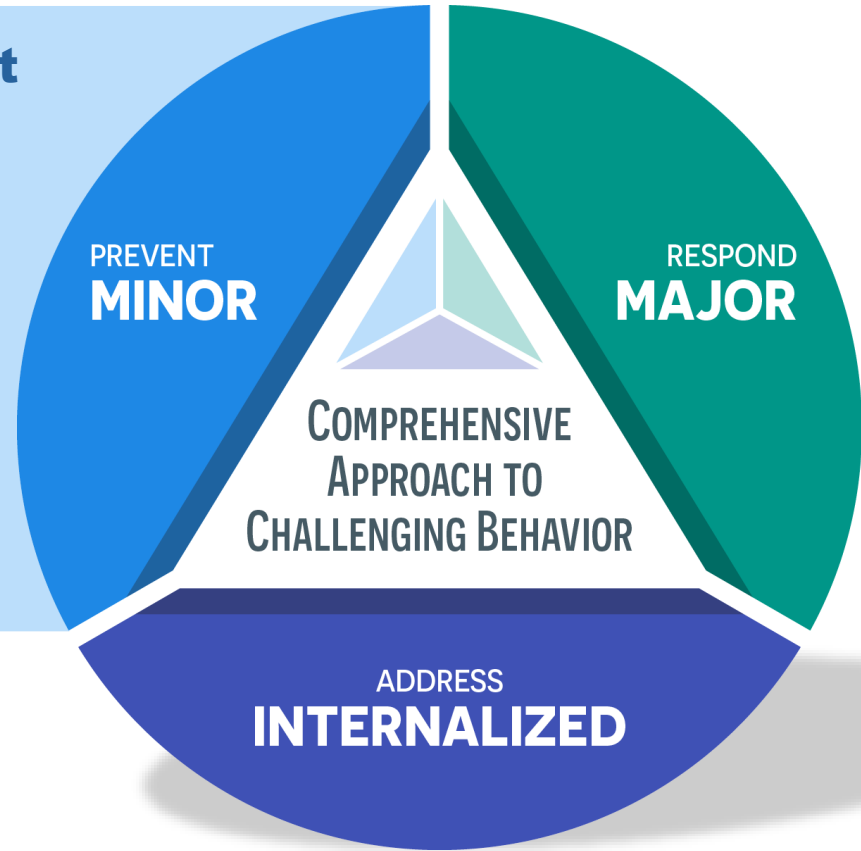
Create a Non-Triggering Environment

CLASSROOM

- 1 Build Relationships
- 2 Establish Routines
- 3 Embrace Deescalation

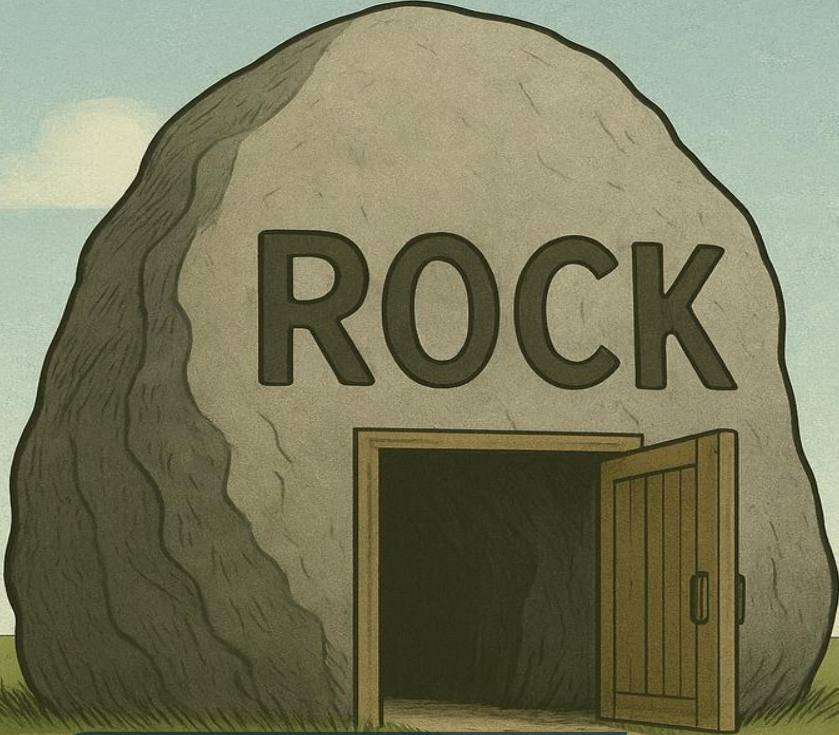
CENTRAL OFFICE

- 4 Consistent Expectations
- 5 Ban Phones



Respond to Major Behavior

Take Steps to Prevent them from
Happening Again in the Future

A large, textured grey rock with a wooden doorway and a single wooden door swung open to the right. The word "ROCK" is written in large, bold, black letters across the front of the rock.

ROCK

**KEEP IN THE
CLASSROOM**

A small wooden building with a sign on top that says "HARD PLACE". The building has a doorway with two wooden doors swung open. The sign is rectangular with a double border and contains the words "HARD" and "PLACE" stacked vertically in bold, black letters.

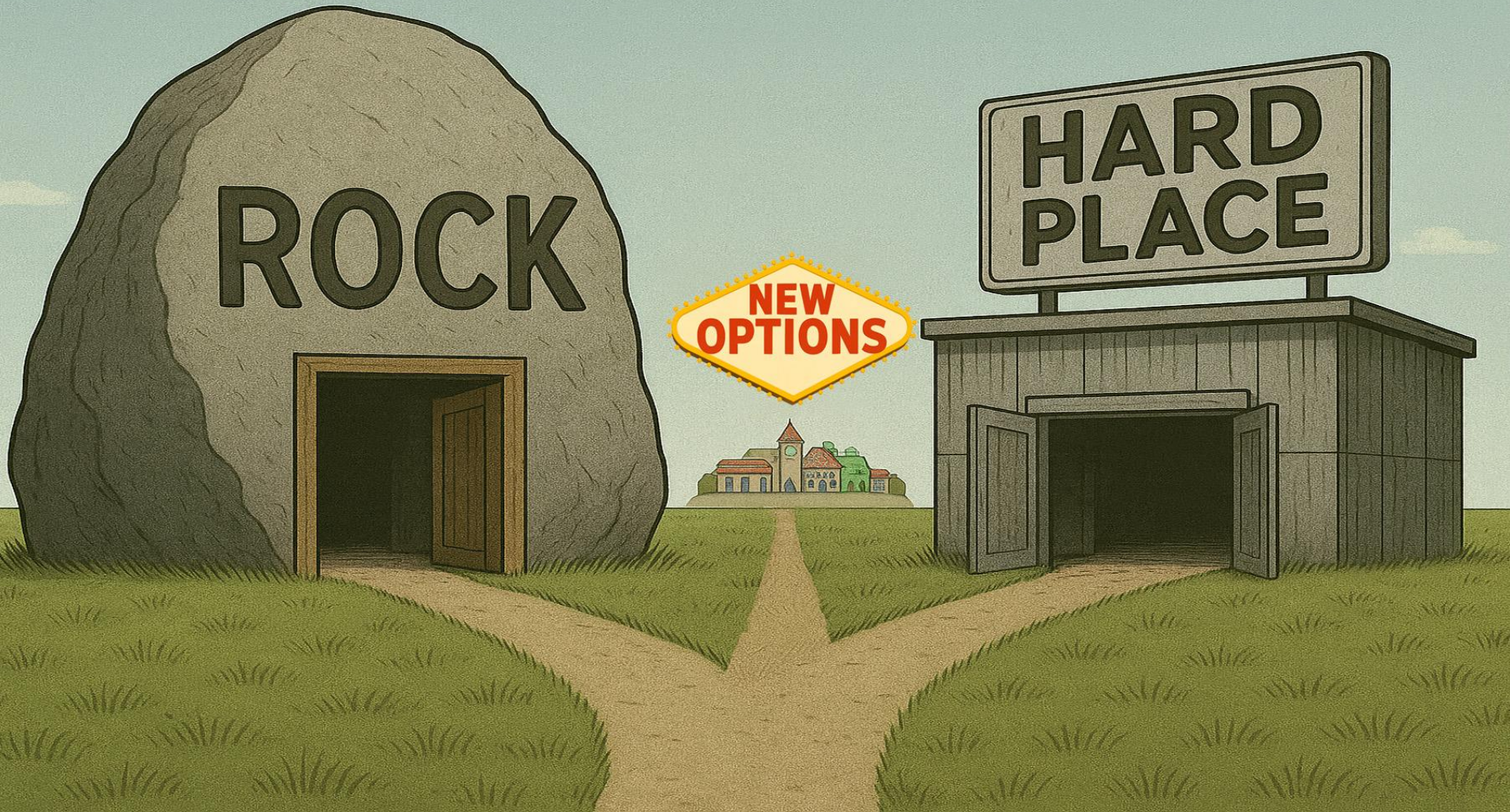
**HARD
PLACE**

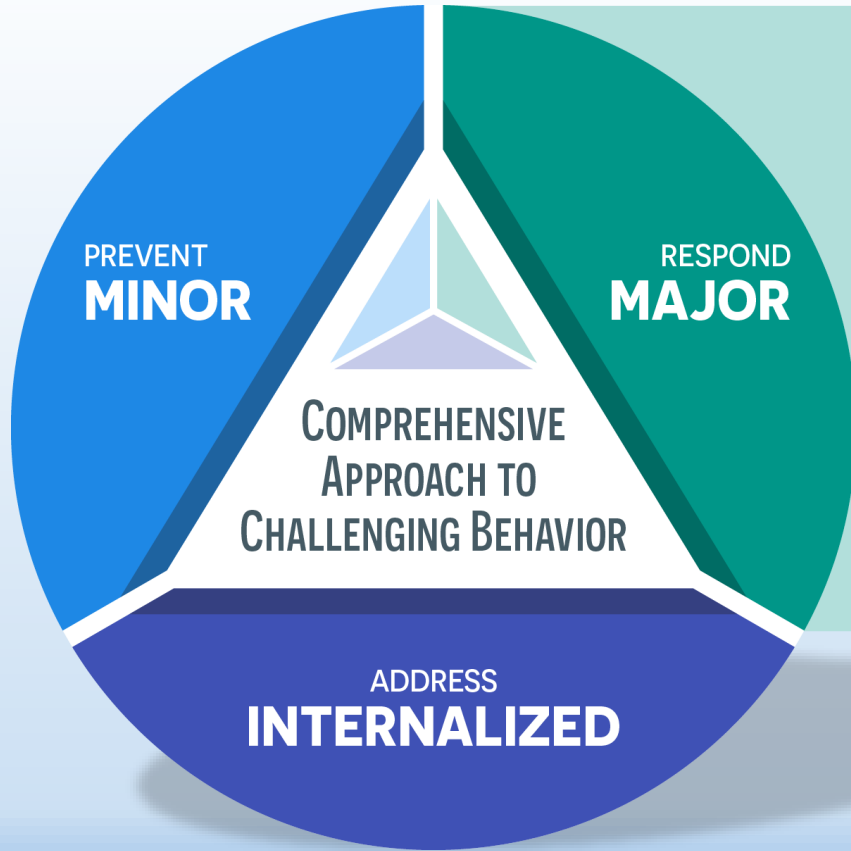
SEND HOME

ROCK

**NEW
OPTIONS**

**HARD
PLACE**





The goal is to help, not to punish

- 1 Provide a Range of High-Quality Out of Classroom Options**
- 2 Have the Right People, With the Right Skills**

What are High-Quality Out of Classroom Options?

BRIEF

Calm down spaces with staff trained in de-escalation and the teaching of coping skills

SHORT

Remove for 1 to 5 days, but maintain learning via Zooming into the classroom or small group tutoring

MEDIUM

In-district programs that teach both academics and coping/self-regulation skills

LONG

Programs for students with severe and frequent behavior challenges

DISCUSSION

- 1. What supports and programs are available in your district?**
- 2. What might be missing from the mix?**

What makes these options high-quality?



**Continuing
Academic
Learning**



**Teaching
Emotional
Regulation,
Self Control,
& Coping Skills**



**Identifying
Triggers of
Challenging
Behavior**

Removal is beneficial for all students and staff when there are a range of high quality options

- Removal is not punishment
- Removal is required for safety and continued learning for the rest of the class
- Removal include continued academic learning ensure the student doesn't fall behind
- Removal options that identify triggers and teach coping skills help students return better off and prevent the cycle from repeating





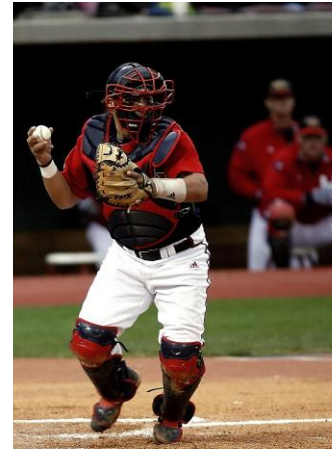
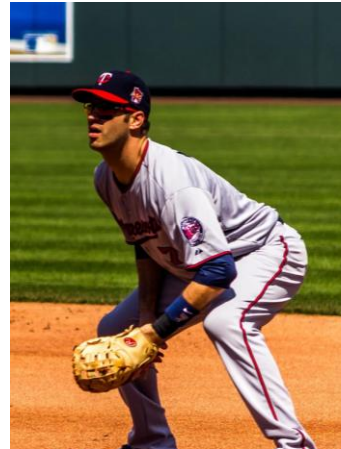
The goal is to return students to the general education classroom when they are ready

What is the key to providing high-quality out of classroom options?

**Have the Right People,
With the Right Skills**



Great pitchers aren't great in the outfield



Different types of behavior specialists embrace different approaches



**Writing Reports
& Assessments**



**Collecting
Data**



**Identifying
Triggers**

All behavior specialists use a mix of these three approaches, but the mix matters!

Different behavior specialists embrace different approaches



Writing Reports
& Assessments



Collecting
Data



Identifying
Triggers

Identifying triggers of challenging behavior can be transformative for students and schools



VS



Address Internalized Behavior

What is internalized behavior?



Challenging Behavior

What is internalized behavior?



EXTERNALIZED



INTERNALIZED

What is internalized behavior?



EXTERNALIZED

Physical Violence

Verbal Outbursts

Aggressive Disrespect

INTERNALIZED

What is internalized behavior?



EXTERNALIZED

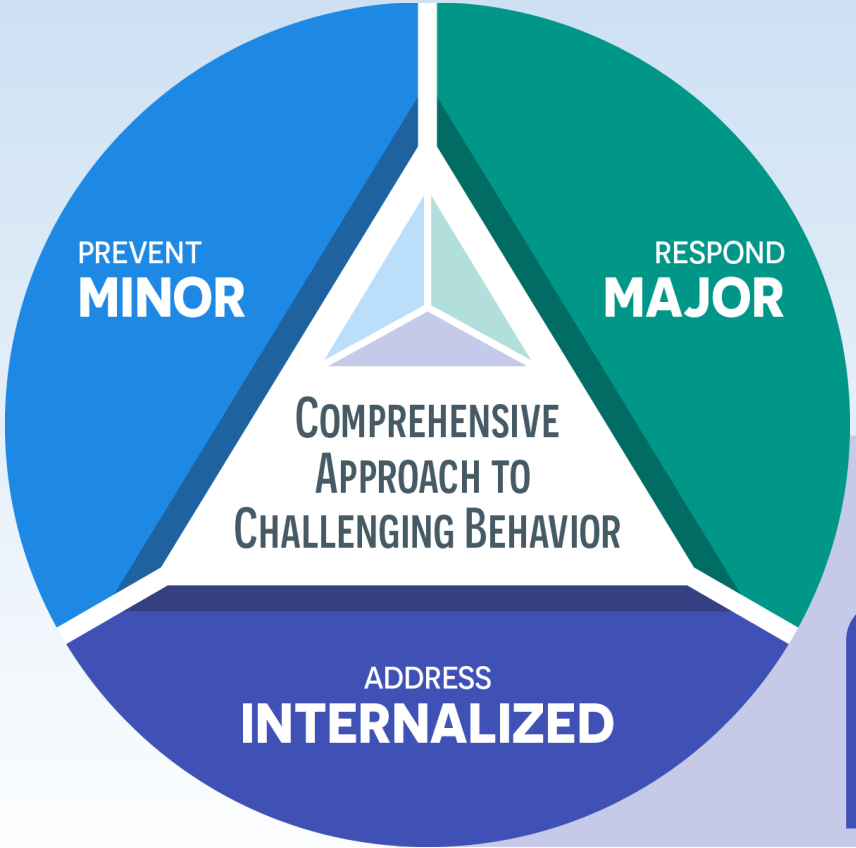
School Phobia

Depression

Anxiety



INTERNALIZED



Avoid Confusing **Internalized**
and **Externalized** Behaviors

1 Create Safe Environment

2 Provide Mental Health Services

Students with internalizing behavior need a calm, safe environment



It's unfair and unproductive to place students with internalizing behavior with students with externalizing behavior

Primary support is mental health counseling



Lessons Learned

Lessons learned the hard way

1

The best designed behavior program doesn't work without the right people in the classroom and as supervisors

2

It's unrealistic to hope discipline alone will forestall most challenging behaviors

3

Don't ask classroom teachers to become behavior experts

4

Don't expect the special education department or assistant principals to manage the most challenging behaviors

5

Restorative practices are valuable, but not a sufficient response to violent behavior



Questions?





Thank You!

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