

# Preface

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WILL SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS WITH ...  
OUR SCHOOL EXISTS TO PROVIDE ALL STUDENTS A ...  
...WHERE THE CHILD COMES FIRST.

You can probably finish the rest of these school or district mission or vision statements, but can you finish them while confidently including the importance of the social-emotional needs of *all* students? To advocate for *all* students when using discipline in an alternative fashion, these commonly used mission or vision statements need to include, "... the social-emotional learning of a student is valued as importantly as any academic subject taught in school." Most mission and vision statements say we support *all* students, but do our actions reflect it when it comes to student behavior? Can we support equity for all students and focus on the social-emotional development of a student while using punitive, exclusionary practices as the only means of teaching behavior? Additionally, there is a disproportionality in discipline for students of color when compared to their white counterparts for similar behavior incidents in schools. For there to be equity in school discipline, a belief system is needed that allows educators to advocate for individualized responses to student behavior rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

We understand the challenge of looking at behavior in the ways described in this book. This book is not based on theory; it is written by practitioners for practitioners and is based on our experiences in changing behavior by using alternatives. The at-risk behavior students on your campus are at a crossroads that will define the direction of their lives. Therefore, the need for innovative methods for addressing discipline is now. Misconceptions arise when the term *alternative discipline* is mentioned; some think of alternative discipline as an excuse to dismiss poor behavior. This is not what is meant by alternative discipline. To help clarify, you need to know what alternative discipline is not.

**Alternative discipline is not** stopping the suspension of students in order to meet a school or district behavior data quota.

*It is using other means of discipline to help students learn from their behaviors rather than sending them home as the first response.*

**Alternative discipline is not** ignoring the stakeholders who have been affected by the student's behavior.

*It is working with the stakeholders to help restore what has been damaged and work together to help the student change his or her behavior.*

**Alternative discipline is not** assigning the same discipline for every student without knowing the reason for the misbehavior.

*It is taking the time to learn about what triggered the behavior in the first place.*

**Alternative discipline is not** a school that does not have effective behavior systems (foundation) in place to support responding to discipline in this fashion.

*It is how discipline is handled in a school that has systems of behavioral supports in place for school-wide, targeted/at-risk groups, and individualized students (special education and general education).*

**Alternative discipline is not** assigned without consistent implementation and follow-through.

*It is a method of delivery that requires the administrator and stakeholders to work together and ensure all components of the alternative discipline are put into place and implemented with fidelity.*

**Alternative discipline is not** easy to do.

*It is time intensive and requires a belief system in the leader(s) of the school and/or district to create a culture that supports working with students in this fashion.*

This book is written to encourage educators to look at discipline from a unique lens. Issues with discipline and challenging behaviors in school tend to provoke negative feelings from educators. We want to help educators take a minute to reflect on what makes discipline frustrating and difficult for stakeholders and feel comfortable with approaching discipline in the way we are suggesting. In order to do so, a school system needs to have a healthy functioning behavioral/social-emotional system designed to respond to the behavioral needs of *all* students. Approaching discipline by only using the traditional approach of suspension is not working for *all* students. Therefore, we challenge educators to be aware of the misconceptions of alternative discipline and really own the words designed to frame a school's or district's identity and culture.