Public school systems are required to provide a safe learning environment free of violence and disruption. For students who threaten the learning of themselves or others, schools frequently develop a disciplinary alternative education placement. Students with a history of behavior problems at school are at greatest risk for future behavior problems and academic failures. In response to evidence that removal discipline techniques had little efficacy, schools have focused on identifying alternative methods of maintaining order and safety. This study evaluated the outcomes of an elementary-level alternative discipline placement with unique intervention programming.

The program includes interventions to increase the effectiveness of traditional alternative discipline placements. Activities focus on promoting social competence and developing social information-processing skills intended to increase the behavioral and academic success of student participants. The program excludes students from the general student population and consists of a behavior management system with gradually increasing behavior expectations, reinforcements and consequences, focused social skills lessons, counseling, and parenting classes.

Participants were consistently lower performing academically than control group students both before and after the program. However, students who experienced fewer discipline removals after the program had higher report card grades. Overall, participants had a decrease in discipline removals after participating in the program but continued to have more
lost instruction days due to discipline than control group students. The higher grade level students had less behavior improvement following the program than younger students. No relation was found between a student’s level of success in the program and their academic or behavioral performance changes. Future research needs include a comparison of students referred for persistent misbehavior and those referred for a single, serious incident and the need to assess the specific skills addressed in the program.