
2021 TOPIC PORTFOLIO

School District of Indian River County



Joint Plan for the Achievement of Unitary Status in the
Matter Styled Sharpton, et al. v. School Board of Indian River
County, FL, No. 1:64-cb-00721 (S.D. Fla.)

SECTION VI: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT/RESOURCE ALLOCATION

June 2021



Section VI: African American Student Achievement/Resource Allocation

The School District of Indian River County Suspension Expulsion Review Team (SERT)

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Overview of Topic

The School District of Indian River County (SDIRC) Suspension/Expulsion Review Team

Alignment with 2018 Joint Plan Section: VI: African American Student Achievement/Resource Allocation

Alignment with 2020-2021 SDIRC African American Achievement Plan: Equitable & Culturally Responsive Tiered Supports

The Suspension Expulsion Review Team (SERT) is comprised of a multi-disciplinary group of professionals, including behavioral/mental health professionals, district and school administrator representatives, and leadership representatives from Exceptional Student Education. The purpose of this team is to review cases referred by school administration to identify each student's needed level of support and corrective interventions as related to the types of infractions and patterns of behavior observed. Students are referred for review by the SERT when students are:

- Being considered for alternative placement at the District's Alternative Center for Education (ACE) and/or expulsion due to the display of severe behavioral infractions (i.e., Level 4 and Level 5 Behaviors) outlined through the SDIRC Code of Student Conduct.
- Returning from Department of Juvenile Justice commitment programs.
- Being processed for off-campus felonies that adversely impact the school environment.

Additional routes for consideration for placement at the District's ACE include:

- Active placement in an alternative school in a previous district.
- Placement of the student at the ACE for needs identified through his/her Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

In addition to reviewing the behaviors for which a student is referred, the SERT conducts a thorough review of each case and corresponding case packet submitted (please see Appendix A for an example of a SERT packet), including the following components:

- Office Discipline Referral(s)
- Student Statement
- Witness Statements (if obtained)
- Supervising Adult Statement Form (if applicable)
- Threat Assessment (required if a substantive threat was made)
- Suspension letter with recommendation for alternative placement
- Parent contact by phone or in-person, prior to initiating suspension/recommendation for alternative program
- Letter/suspension notice sent home to parent/guardian
- Incident report signed by administrator
- Picture/video of evidence (if applicable)
- Alternative Measures Form with progress monitoring data
- Law Enforcement Report OR Law Enforcement Report Pending
- Functional Behavioral Assessment/Behavior Intervention Plan (if applicable)
- Behavior Contract (if applicable)
- Health Information (e.g., current diagnoses, medication)
- Relevant social, emotional, behavioral data
- Department of Juvenile Justice recommendations
- Daily attendance: Excused/Unexcused
- Total # suspension days
- Grade Point Average

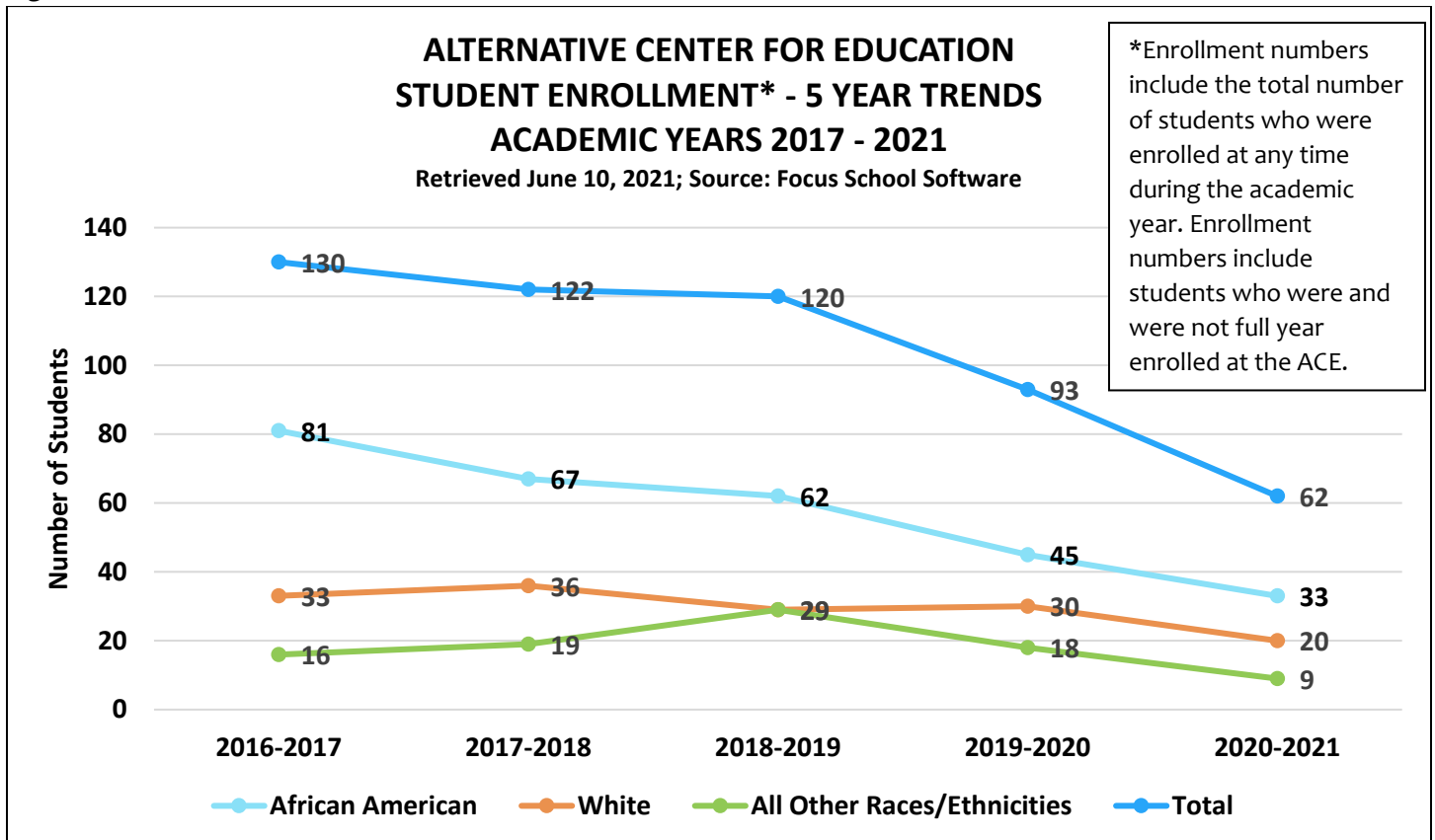
- Number of credits earned
- Number of referrals - year to date
- Enrollment History
- Exceptional Student Education Eligibility/Section 504 Status; manifestation determination reviews

Following this review, the SERT makes recommendations related to placement and associated supports or the need for an expulsion hearing. Examples of supports and corrective interventions that are recommended by the SERT include: return to the home zoned school with a stipulated order, referral to behavioral or mental health services (including substance abuse counseling), referral to the student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Team, placement at the alternative school, or recommendation for an expulsion hearing. SERT representatives also serve a role in ensuring that interventions have been implemented with sufficient levels of consistency and intensity to address behaviors of concern, and that all statutory and due process rights/guidelines have been followed prior to recommending a student for alternative placement or an expulsion hearing.

Historical Context

A catalyst for further review of the SERT referral process was the observation of current and historical racial disparities in the enrollment of students at the District's ACE. Figure A illustrates enrollment trends at the ACE over the last five academic years. This shows significant decreases in the total number of students enrolled at the ACE over the last five years, as well as the number of African American students enrolled at the ACE. During this time period, the number of enrolled White students has decreased, but at a slower rate compared to African American students. While the number of enrolled African American students has decreased significantly over time, African American students remain overrepresented at the ACE in comparison to the percentage of African American students in the total student population.

Figure A. ACE Student Enrollment – 5 Year Trends



SERT Referrals & Outcomes Profile

Referrals

During the 2020-2021 academic year, 47 referrals were made and reviewed by the SERT. All referrals made to the SERT during the current academic year were for students in grades 6-12, with the overwhelming majority of referrals (79%) being made for male students (see *Figure B*). A review of data based upon the race/ethnicity of the students being referred to SERT showed that 47% of the referred students were African American (see *Figure C*). This referral percentage is approximately two and a half times higher than the overall District's percentage of African American students (i.e., 18%), indicating that African American students are being referred to SERT at a higher rate than White students, as well as students of all other races/ethnicities.

Figure B. Percentage of SERT Referrals by Sex – Districtwide

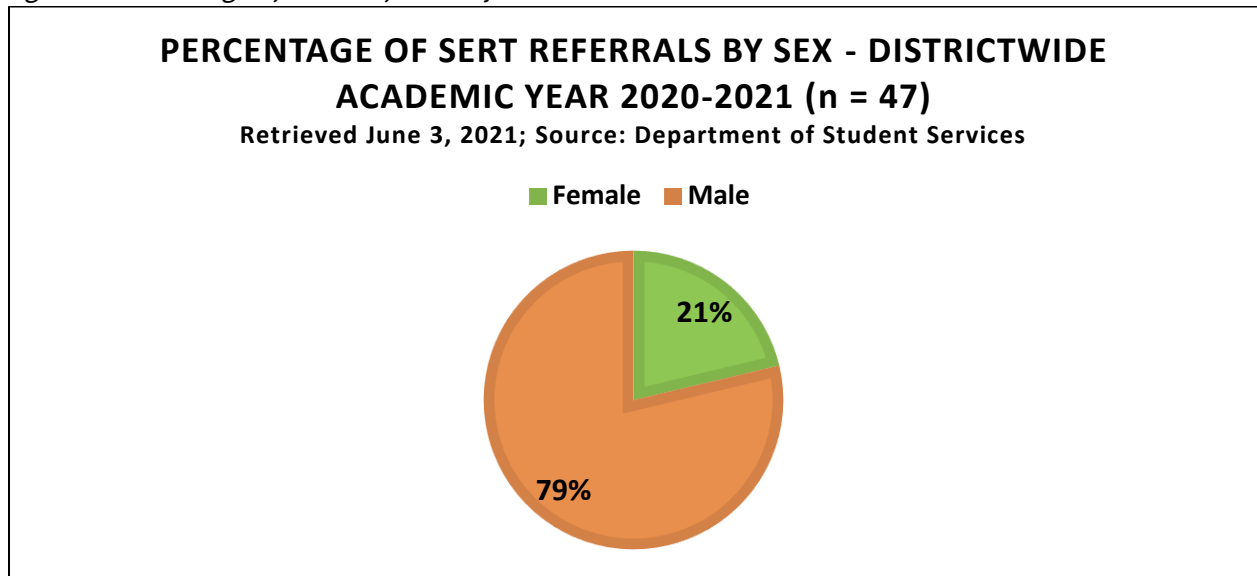
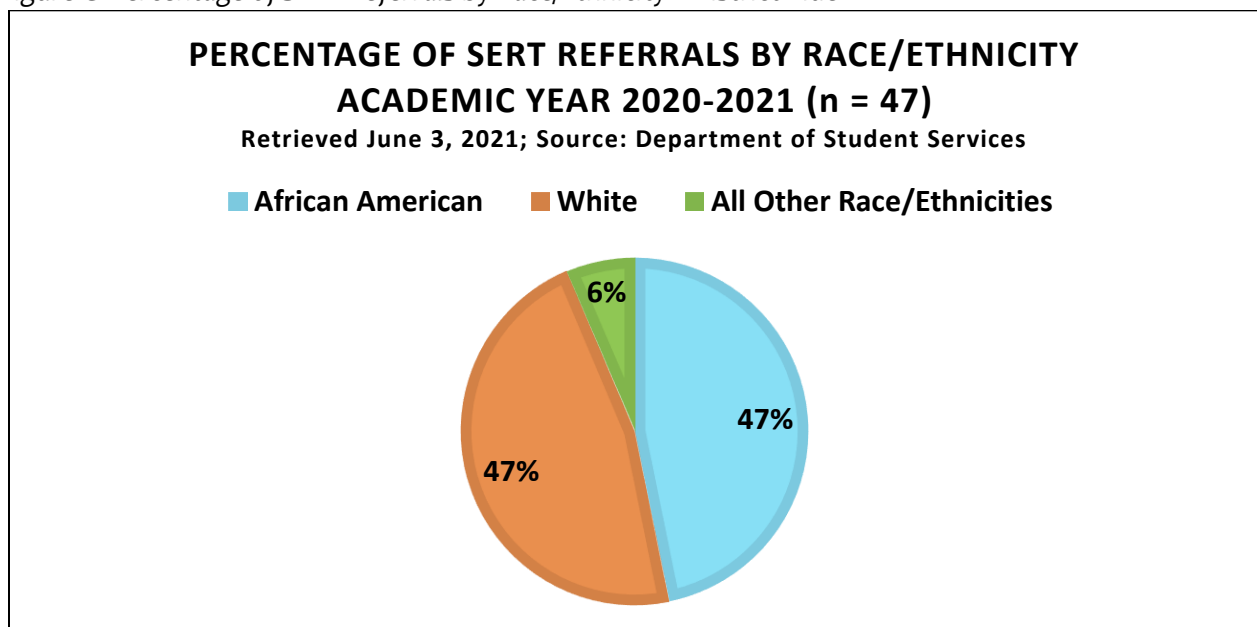
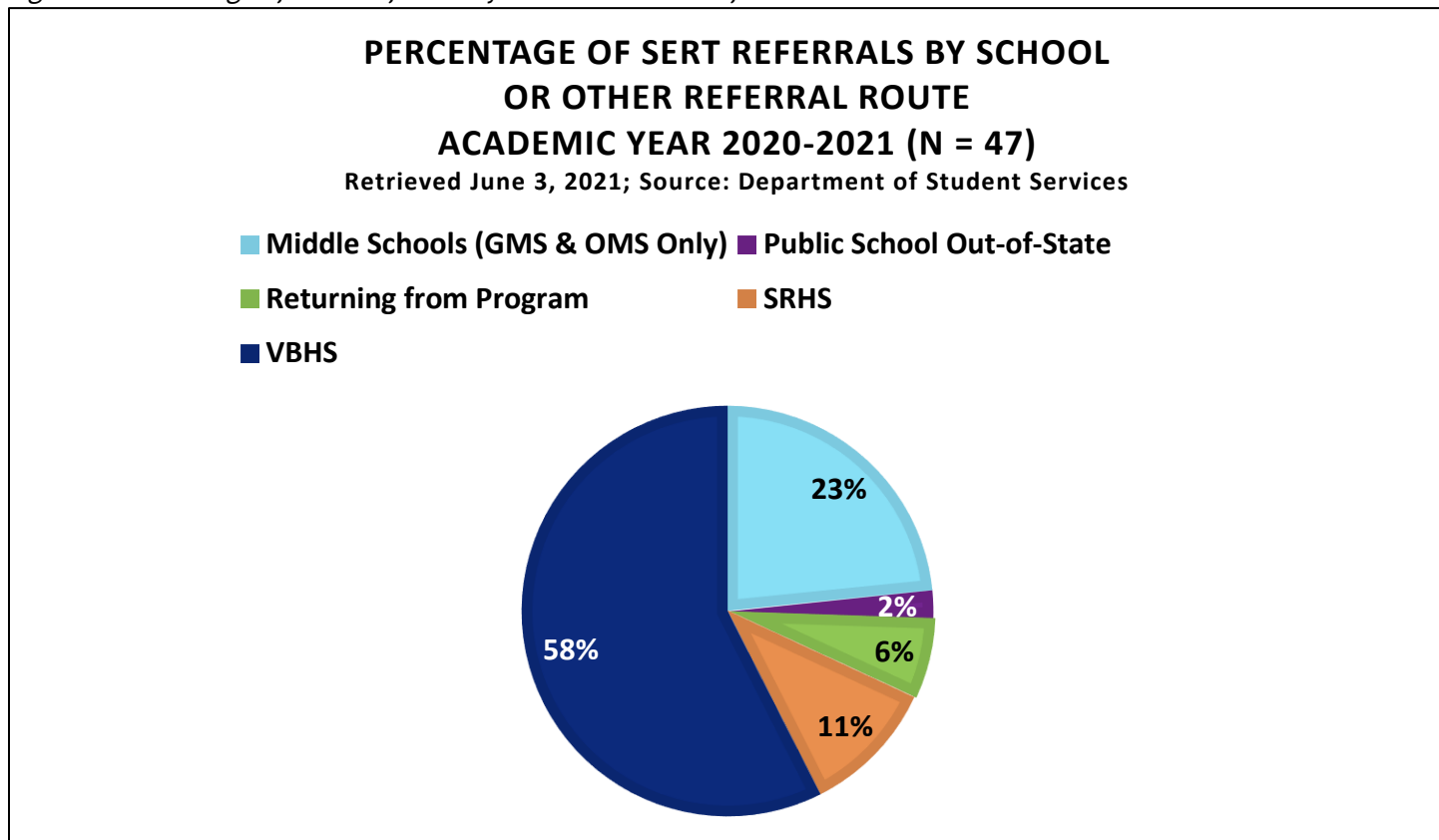


Figure C. Percentage of SERT Referrals by Race/Ethnicity – Districtwide



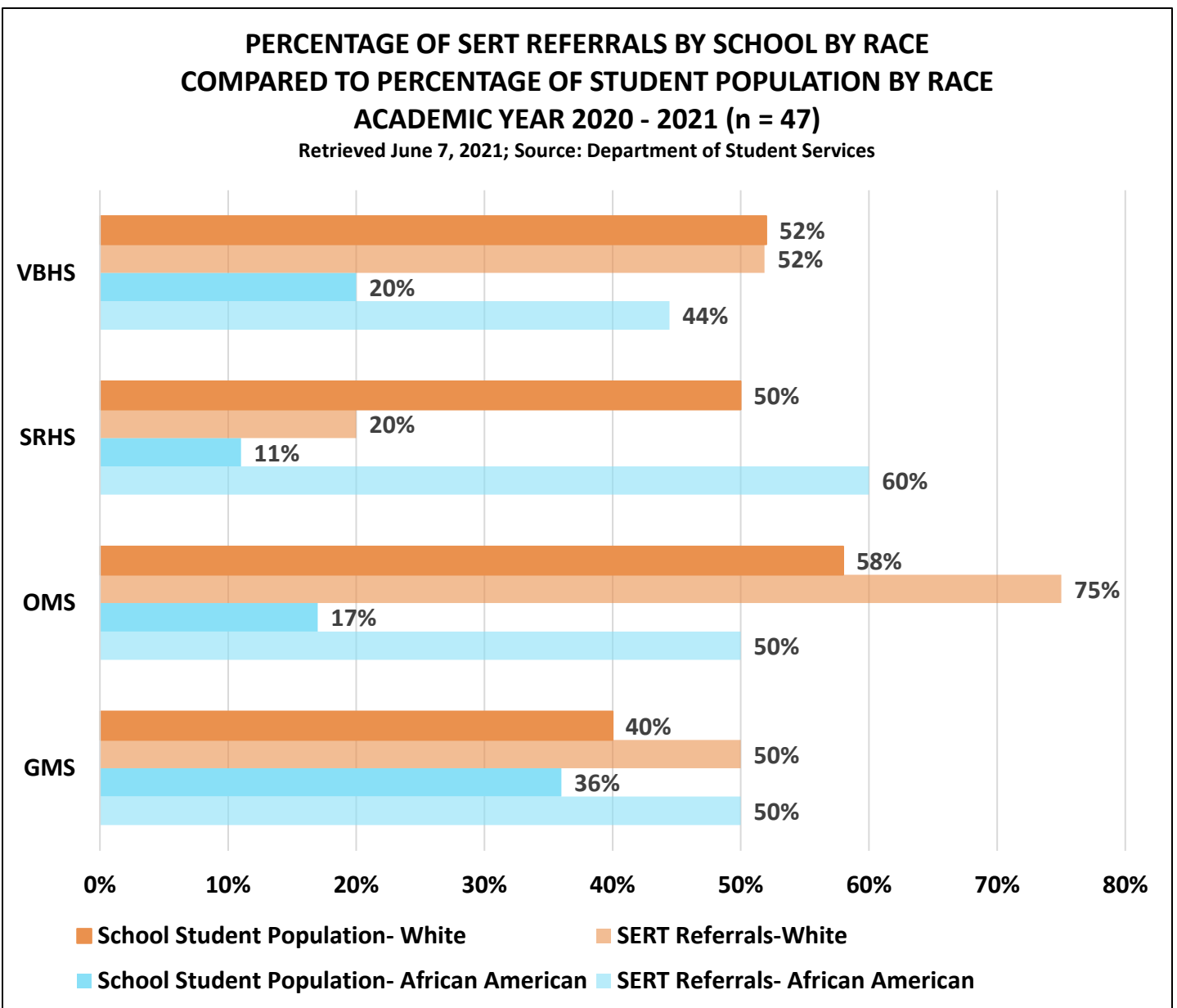
The primary route of referral to SERT is by the student’s assigned school due to the display of a severe behavioral infraction (Level 4 or Level 5 behavior, as outlined through the Code of Student Conduct). During the current year, 92% of students referred to the SERT were referred by their school, with the District’s two high schools representing the largest numbers of referrals to the SERT (see Figure D). Vero Beach High School comprised the largest percentage (58%) of total referrals to the SERT, while also having a larger student population than other schools in the District (VBHS has approximately 35% of the district’s non-charter secondary student population). It is important to note that only two of the four middle schools in the District (Gifford Middle School and Oslo Middle School) made referrals of students to SERT during the current academic year.

Figure D. Percentage of SERT Referrals by School or Other Referral Route



Referrals of students to the SERT by school were further disaggregated by race (see Figure E). The percentage of African American students comprising the total number of referrals by each school is consistently higher than what would be expected based upon the percentage of African American students comprising the total population in each school. A closer look shows the largest disparities between enrollments and referrals are at Oslo Middle School and Sebastian River High School for the current school year. With this, it is also important to consider that these schools had a much smaller total number of referrals to the SERT as compared with Vero Beach High School. When a small number of total referrals are present, percentages related to racial representation can change significantly based upon the additional referral of 1-2 students.

Figure E. Percentage of SERT Referrals by School by Race



Additionally, smaller numbers of referrals at schools also point to the importance of reviewing the specific behavioral infractions for which students are being referred and whether patterns in the primary reasons for referral can be identified. *Table A* provides information on the number of SERT referrals by primary referral reason by race. The most frequently occurring primary referral reason for which African American students were referred to SERT was for fighting (n = 7), while the most frequent reason White students were referred to SERT was for alcohol possession and/or use (n = 4). It is important to note that the referral reasons identified are the *primary* referral reason, and students may have additional behavioral infractions for which they have been referred or exhibited during the school year.

Table A. Number of SERT Referrals by Primary Referral Reason by Race - Districtwide

Academic Year 2020-2021 (n = 44)

Retrieved June 3, 2021; Source: Department of Student Services

Primary Referral Reason*	African American	White	Total
Aggravated Battery/Assault/Physical Attack	3		3
Alcohol Possession and/or Use		4	4
Disrespect/Non-Compliance	1		1
Disruption on Campus - Major	1		1
Drug Possession and/or Use (Excluding Alcohol)	1	2	3
Drug Sales and/or Distribution (Excluding Alcohol)		1	1
Fighting	7	2	9
Imminent Danger to Self or Others	1	1	2
Inappropriate Behavior/Disruption	1		1
Larceny/Theft/Motor Vehicle Theft under \$300.00	1	3	4
Lewd & Lascivious Behavior on Minor	1		1
Other Major Unclassified Offense		1	1
Review Stipulated Order		1	1
Review/Student Returning from Program	1	1	2
Sexual Harassment		1	1
Teasing/Taunting/Threatening Behavior		1	1
Threat		2	2
Weapon Possession/Weapons and Firearm Charges	4	2	6

*Data included in the table is representative of the primary reason for referral of a student to the SERT. The student also may have been referred for additional behavioral infractions and may have a history of a pattern of Office Discipline Referrals.

Outcomes

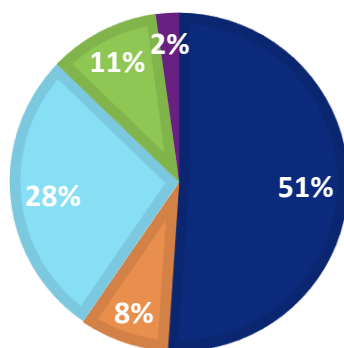
When student cases are reviewed by the SERT, a variety of recommendations could be made in response to behaviors identified and the specific student and school needs for support. *Figure F* provides the percentage of SERT referral outcomes by type of outcome recommended by the SERT following the review of each case. The most frequently recommended outcome in response to a SERT referral is placement at the Alternative Center for Education (51%). During the current academic year, less than .5% of the District's total student population was referred to the SERT. Considering the low referral rate, the observation of just over 50% of students referred to SERT being recommended for alternative school suggests that those students referred to the SERT are engaging in the most severe of behavioral infractions. Furthermore, this same observation combined with the observation that over a third of referrals result in a return to school also suggests a need for additional analysis into the degree of fidelity with which the appropriate levels of tiered interventions and supports are being implemented at the school level for specific types of student behaviors.

Figure F. SERT Referral Outcomes – Percentage by Outcome Type

**SERT REFERRAL OUTCOMES -
PERCENTAGES BY OUTCOME TYPE - DISTRICTWIDE
ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021 (n = 47)**

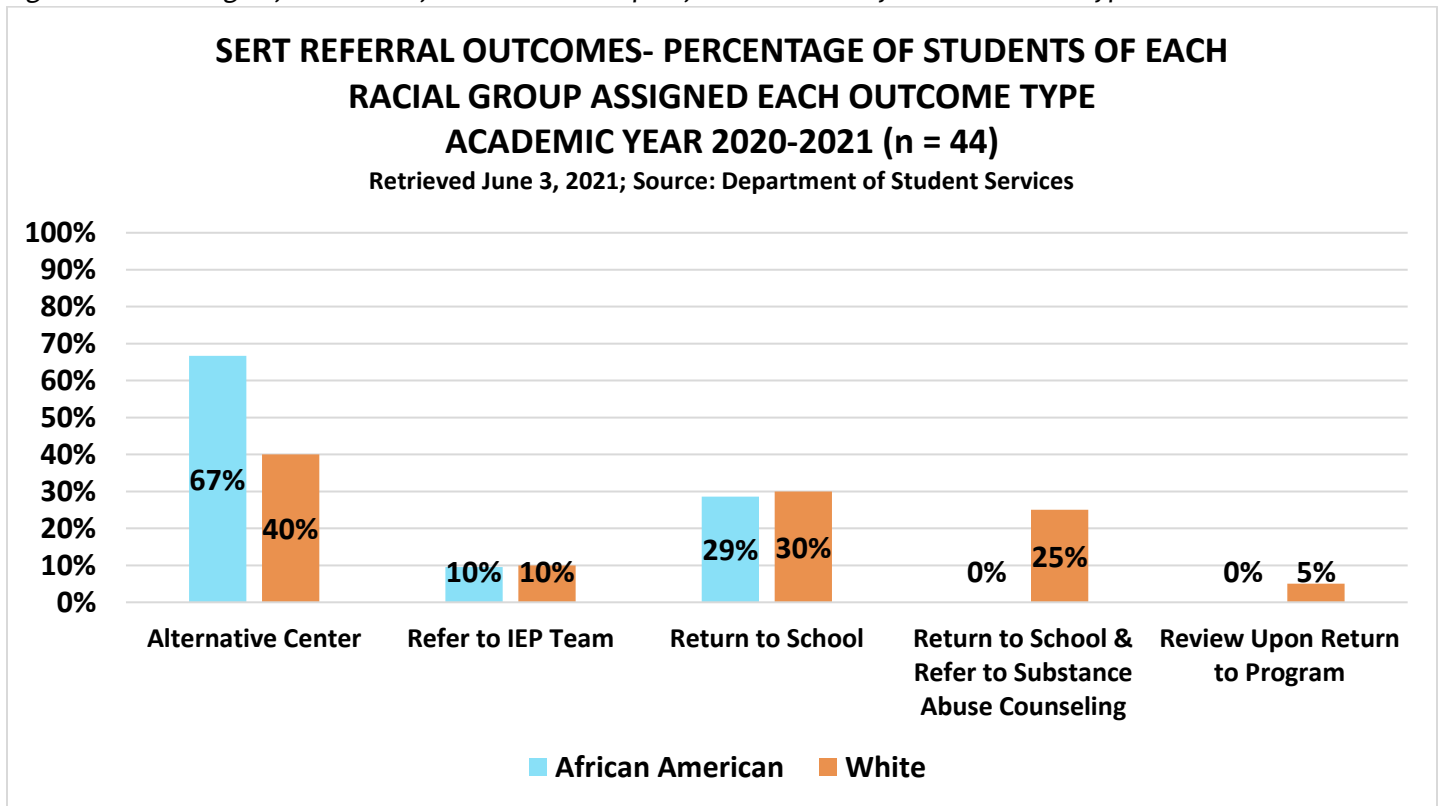
Retrieved June 3, 2021; Source: Department of Student Services

- Alternative Center
- Refer to IEP Team
- Return to School
- Return to School & Refer to Substance Abuse Counseling
- Review Upon Return from Program



While acknowledging the small percentage of the total student population referred to the SERT during the current academic year, SERT outcomes were analyzed related to race by SERT outcome type (please see Figure G). An initial analysis of outcomes shows that a larger percentage of African American students referred to the SERT were recommended for alternative placement as compared with White students. However, a notable difference is that a greater percentage of White students were recommended for a return to their homezoned school with a referral to substance abuse counseling. This difference in referral to substance abuse counseling can likely be attributed to the higher number of White students being referred to the SERT for the behavioral infractions of “Alcohol Possession and/or Use.” Additionally, while not noted above, seven White students were noted to withdraw from the District to enter homeschooling, another district, etc. after being referred and reviewed by the SERT. In contrast, one African American student was noted to withdraw following referral and review by the SERT. These two observations could explain in part the initial observed disparity in alternative placement. Finally, the percentages of African American students and White students recommended for review by the student’s IEP Team or for a return to a student’s homezoned school were comparable.

Figure G. Percentage of Students of Each Racial Group Referred to SERT by SERT Outcome Type - Districtwide



Taken together, an evaluation of SERT referrals and outcomes by race clearly indicates the presence of racial disparities in SERT referrals and recommendations for placement at the District’s alternative school. However, this conclusion may somewhat be tempered in the low instance rate. Regardless, further problem solving should be employed to reduce and eliminate this disparity. SERT referrals and potential recommendation for placement at the District’s alternative school are some of the last corrective interventions along the path of progressive discipline outlined by the District’s Code of Student Conduct. As such, the most effective methods for eliminating disparities in disciplinary outcomes, including alternative disciplinary placement, are likely connected to those behaviors and disciplinary processes that occur earlier along a student’s disciplinary trajectory. If proper interventions are in place earlier in a student’s disciplinary trajectory, it could eliminate the need for the referral to SERT. With this, a comprehensive analysis of behavioral indicators such as Office Discipline Referrals and Classroom Removals would likely provide the most useful information to identify root causes of disproportionality in SERT referrals and alternative disciplinary placement to guide the implementation of evidence-based strategies to eliminate the observed disparities.

Strategies Implemented

The referral of a student to the SERT, and potential placement at the Alternative Center for Education, is designated through our Student Code of Conduct to be utilized for only the most severe behavioral infractions. With the exception of single event, highly egregious behavioral infractions, students who are referred to the SERT often have displayed patterns of behavior in need of highly structured and specialized behavioral supports. Given this, strategies utilized to address disparities in placement at the Alternative School encompass primary and secondary prevention strategies implemented prior to referral to the SERT, in addition to strategies specifically focused on the SERT referral and review process. Strategies implemented during the 2020-2021 academic year are provided below:

- Added Success Coaches at each secondary school to support preventive and intervention measures to improve student behavior.
- Implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework at all elementary and secondary schools.
- Provided state-supported professional development monthly to PBIS Coaches for the implementation of the PBIS framework.
- Worked with VBHS to provide a comprehensive trauma-informed care professional development series with a district community partner, Tykes and Teens.
- Expanded mental health supports at VBHS/FLC and Wabasso School through a community partnership with Tykes & Teens.
- Provided district-facilitated professional development on prevention and corrective intervention strategies and social emotional learning.
- Developed Power BI discipline data dashboards to easily and efficiently disaggregate discipline data by student subgroups.
- Conducted DataCom and District Level Reviews of behavior and discipline data, including disparities in discipline.
- Conducted bi-weekly Cabinet-level data reviews focused in part on discipline disparities resulting in specific actions to reduce disproportionality.
- Conducted follow-up, focused discipline support walkthroughs at schools with high teacher Office Discipline Referrals.
- Provided professional development to school transportation professionals to assist in improving behavior and discipline on school transportation.
- Provided professional development sessions on culturally responsive practices.
- Developed and initiated professional development for United Through Equity micro-credentialing.
- Created and disseminated written guidance regarding the Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension Program via professional development and the “Collaborator” to school administrators.
- Monitored student participation in the Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension Program, including referring schools, reason for referral, recidivism, and non-attendance.
- Conducted monitoring and required supervisor approval of the assignment of out-of-school suspensions.
- Conducted feedback sessions with district, school, and community representatives, as well as student focus groups from each secondary school related to changes in the Code of Student Conduct.
- Provided a district-facilitated MTSS Bootcamp to School Leadership Teams, emphasizing a whole-child approach to supporting students through tiered interventions and supports.
- Developed the Alternative Intervention Measures (AIM) Mentorship Program set to launch in the 2021-2022 school year.
- Initiated revisions to the SERT procedures and manual to integrate supports with the AIM Mentorship Program.

- Conducted multi-disciplinary reviews of SERT referrals, that included diverse representation of staff members.
- Monitored SERT referrals and outcomes, as well as ACE enrollment, by student subgroup.

Progress Monitoring

The discipline data provided below includes information on Office Discipline Referrals, In-School-Suspensions (ISS), Out-of-School Suspensions (OSS), and racial representation of students placed at the District's alternative disciplinary school. Significant decreases in the assignment of OSS have been observed districtwide as compared with the previous academic year. Additionally, African American-White disparities in classroom removals (ISS and OSS) have narrowed from a classroom removal risk ratio of 4.0 in 19-20 to a classroom removal risk ratio of 2.06 in 20-21. Disproportionate racial representation continues to be observed at the ACE, with 70% of the 33 students currently placed at the ACE being African American. As mentioned previously, a noteworthy observation made related to the racial composition of students placed at the ACE is that seven white students were noted to withdraw from the District to enter homeschooling, another district, etc. after being referred to the SERT. In contrast, one African American student was noted to withdraw following referral to the SERT. While this pattern of withdrawal does not impact disparities in referrals to SERT by race, it does impact the relative percentages of students by race that are ultimately enrolled at the ACE.

For the following tables: Data is representative of K-12, non-charter & charter schools in the SDIRC.

Percentage of Students within Each Racial Subgroup with One or More Office Discipline Referral – Grades KG - 12 Retrieved 06/01/21, Source: Focus School Software						
Race	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021		June 2021	
			#	%	#	%
African American	9%	11%	403/3056	13%	451/3048	15%
White, Non-Hispanic	5%	5%	565/8838	6%	649/8806	7%

Percentage of Students within Each Racial Subgroup with One or More In-School-Suspension – Grades KG - 12 Retrieved 06/01/21, Source: Focus School Software						
Race	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021		June 2021	
			#	%	#	%
African American	3%	3%	118/3056	4%	138/3048	5%
White, Non-Hispanic	1%	2%	182/8838	2%	211/8806	2%

Percentage of Students within Each Racial Subgroup with One or More Out-of-School Suspension – Grades KG - 12 Retrieved 06/01/21, Source: Focus School Software						
Race	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021		June 2021	
			#	%	#	%
African American	1%	1%	25/3056	1%	33/3048	1%
White, Non-Hispanic	0.2%	0.3%	39/8838	0.4%	50/8806	0.6%

**To protect the privacy of individual students, data are not reported when the total number of students is fewer than 10.

Racial Representation in the Alternative Disciplinary School (Alternative Center for Education) – Grades 6 - 12 Retrieved 06/01/21, Source: Focus School Software						
Race	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021		June 2021	
			#	%	#	%
African American	77%	67%	21/30	70%	23/33	70%
White, Non-Hispanic	**	26%	<10	**	**	**

**To protect the privacy of individual students, data are not reported when the total number of students is fewer than 10.

Next Steps

Based upon progress monitoring conducted this year and feedback gathered from a variety of stakeholders, the next steps to reduce disparities in disciplinary outcomes including placement at the ACE are:

- Implement the Alternative Intervention Measures Mentorship Program during the 2021-2022 school year.
- Identify and deliver needed professional development sessions for the upcoming academic year based upon 2020-2021 discipline outcomes.
- Continue to require district-level approval prior to assigning out-of-school suspensions.
- Continue to monitor disparities in discipline data through DataCom and district-level reviews to identify focus schools for follow-up and additional support.
- Implement a “Train-the-Trainer” model to increase capacity and effective implementation of the MTSS framework that emphasizes a “whole-child” approach.
- Continue to conduct multi-disciplinary reviews of SERT referrals, that included diverse representation of staff members.
- Continue to monitor SERT referrals and outcomes and ACE enrollment by student subgroup.
- Continue to implement preventative discipline professional development such as Trauma Informed Care, de-escalation strategies, and CHAMPS.
- Refine the Discipline Power BI dashboard to further highlight racial disparities in discipline practices to include locations of referrals, actions taken with each referral, and recidivism rates.
- Provide training on the MTSS framework to ensure related supports and resources are deployed effectively and efficiently.

Appendix A

Example of a SERT Referral Packet

ALTERNATIVE PACKET CHECKLIST

Eligibility Criteria: Middle and high school principals or their designee, may refer students who have a history of excessive discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions* for behaviors which are by nature dangerous to self and to others. Students will be eligible for SERT review for this program after in-school interventions have been attempted and proven unsuccessful.

*A profile of chronic offenders includes students whose behaviors:

1. Result in frequent conflicts with other students and/or staff which are not limited to one class, one teacher, or an isolated situation.
2. Persistently interfere with his or her own learning or the educational process of others, and,
3. Require attention and help beyond that which the basic instructional program can provide.

Student _____ ID# _____ School _____

Today's Date _____ Date of Incident _____

First Day of Suspension _____ Last Day of Suspension _____

Administrator _____

***** **Manifestation Determination for students qualifying for and/or receiving ESE or 504 services** *****

Has the student been evaluated for special services? _____ If yes, date of most recent evaluation _____

Total # of days suspended _____ Manifestation Meeting Date _____ Manifestation of Disability _____

- If the student was suspended for more than ten days, SERT will not review the case without a completed Manifestation Determination. Please include copies of all documents.

- ☐ Suspension Letter with Recommendation for Alternative
- ☐ Discipline referral with recommendation
- ☐ Contact parent by phone, prior to initiating suspension/recommendation for alternative program.
- ☐ Send letter/suspension notice home to parent/guardian
- ☐ E-mail Coordinator of Student Assignment and Coordinator of Student Services to notify that an alternative packet is being submitted. In the email provide student ID and starting date of suspension.
- ☐ Incident report signed by administrator
- ☐ Student Statement
Daily attendance: Excused: _____ Unexcused: _____ Suspension days: _____
Grade: _____
GPA: _____
Number of referrals year to date: _____
- ☐ Alternative Measures Form/Behavior Contract/Interventions/Motivational Assessment of Behavior (if applicable)
 - Please provide a summary (date, time, target behavior)
- ☐ Health Information (medication)
- ☐ Other pertinent information

Principal/designee's signature _____

Date: _____

School District of Indian River County STUDENT STATEMENT FORM

Date_____

**School District of Indian River County
ALTERNATIVE MEASURES/INTERVENTIONS FORM**

Student _____ School _____ ID# _____

Counseling Services	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
<i>Individual Counseling Sessions</i>							
<i>Schedule Changes</i>							
<i>Group Counseling Sessions</i>							
<i>Parent Conference</i>							
<i>Parent Phone Contact</i>							
<i>Referral to Psychologist for Intervention</i>							
<i>PS Rtl</i>							
Attendance/Social Work Services							
<i>Individual/Group Counseling</i>							
<i>Referral to Community Resource</i>							
<i>Family Intervention</i>							
<i>Home Visit</i>							
<i>Crisis Assessment</i>							
Discipline Procedures							
<i>Administrative counseling</i>							
<i>Parent conference/phone contact</i>							
<i>Detention</i>							
<i>Saturday/Friday School</i>							
<i>Work Detail</i>							
<i>In-School Suspension</i>							
<i>Out-of-School Suspension</i>							
<i>Time-Out Assignments</i>							
<i>Referral to School Resource Officer</i>							
Behavioral Intervention							
<i>Behavior Agreement</i>							
<i>Referral to SSS</i>							
<i>Behavior Plan</i>							
<i>IEP/Placement Change</i>							
<i>Functional Behavioral Assessment & Behavior Intervention Strategies</i>							
Alternative Programming							
<i>Referral/Placement to ACE</i>							
<i>PBD</i>							
<i>AIC</i>							
<i>Re-entry Agreement</i>							
Other:							

None of the above measures were taken because this was the student's first offense and it was of such a serious nature that a recommendation for expulsion was deemed appropriate.

Principal/Designee's Name

Principal/Designee's Signature