

## **SCHOOL RESULTS UTILIZING SRT® CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULA FOR AT-RISK YOUTH**

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### Abstract

Social Responsibility Training (SRT®) is standardized cognitive behavioral school prevention and intervention curricula developed since 2001 in response to needs identified by Montana educators for programming to prevent high-risk youth dropping out of school. SRT® has now been used in 20 school districts in 7 states. SRT® was modeled on Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT®), a well researched correctional program for reducing recidivism, used with over 400,000 criminal offenders in 43 states since 1987. SRT® addresses social/emotional skill development, decision-making and moral reasoning. This paper describes SRT®, reviews promising preliminary findings in reducing school dropouts and enhancing school performance from applications in school districts in Montana, Colorado, Washington, Georgia, Arizona and Michigan, and reviews directions for future research.

### **Introduction**

When a young person is suspended from school for behavioral problems, substance abuse or truancy, or chooses to drop out of school, this event frequently leads to long-term psychological adjustment problems, unemployment or underemployment, substance abuse or other risk taking behaviors, and frequently, involvement in either the criminal justice or the welfare systems. The psychological cost of these system failures for each individual and his/her family is tragic, and the economic and social cost for society in terms of lost human potential, medical, social services, law enforcement and criminal justice system costs is staggering. Cohen (1998, 5) estimated

[T]he monetary value of saving one 'high risk youth' from a life of crime, drug abuse, or dropping out of high school to be \$1.3- \$1.5 million in 1997 dollars (discounted to present

value). Comparable estimates are \$370,000 to \$970,000 for a heavy drug abuser, and \$243,000 to \$388,000 for a high school dropout.

### Targeting Youth Risk and Protective Factors

Many researchers over the past 30 years have identified the characteristics of youth at risk of behavior problems, truancy, dropping out, and substance abuse. Science-based character development interventions are designed to *decrease* dimensions of character that are major student risk factors for behavioral and substance abuse problems and *increase* “protective factors” that protect against drug use and abuse (US Department of Health and Human Services 1999). Jessor and Jessor (1977) identified 17 risk factors for youth conduct disorder.

- peer drug use
- school suspensions
- law infringements
- truancy
- conflict with parents
- regular smoking
- lower school aspirations
- more school failures
- emotional distress and life dissatisfaction
- impulsiveness, restlessness and rebelliousness
- diminished verbal proficiency
- unconventional attitudes
- less church attendance
- shyness and aggression
- high novelty seeking and low harm avoidance
- hostility and limit testing
- negativism

Effective youth programs can unite the energies of schools, youth, parents, community leaders, human service agencies, law enforcement, corrections, and the judiciary to implement cost-effective and research-based solutions. Objectives of multi-system interventions are to support youth character and life skill development, reduce system failures, enhance school performance, involve parents, decrease criminal behavior, increase community safety, and prepare young people to be contributing members of society.

### **Development of SRT® Curricula for At-risk Youth**

The SRT® project was initiated by educators at Billings Senior High School (BSHS) in Montana who sought a practical solution to school behavior and environment challenges. Principal Carol Wicker and Associate Principal Tom Willis sought a curriculum to use with students facing long-term suspension. After reviewing several programs, these administrators initiated a pilot project during January of 2000 utilizing daily Moral Reconnection Therapy (MRT®) (Little & Robinson, 1988) classes. Because of its origins in criminal justice, Billings educators found MRT® was not an ideal fit for school implementation. Accordingly, during 2001, administrators requested that Lasater and Robinson develop school-specific student behavior accountability and skill development curricula suitable for daily class delivery. Lasater and Robinson (2001) began development of SRT® curricula (Lasater and Robinson 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003), and BSHS began piloting SRT® during fall semester of 2001. MRT® was used in parallel with SRT® during school year 2001-2002, and SRT® has been used since fall of 2002.

SRT® consists of standardized, cognitive behavioral exercises designed to teach participants thinking, judgment and life skills through daily classes. These systematic, step-by-step curricula are designed to alter how participants think, how they make judgments and decisions about right and wrong, and promote actions and behaviors focused on changing negative relationships. SRT® curricula are designed as open-ended classes. Youth (or parents and guardians) enter at any time and work at their individual pace to process exercises and tasks sequentially. Advanced participants are asked to teach those who are newer in the program.

SRT® focuses systematically on six life issues.

- Confrontation and assessment of self: Participants assess beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and defense mechanisms.
- Assessment of relationships (includes planning to heal relationships that have been harmed)
- Reinforcement of positive behavior and habits: Helping others raises awareness of moral responsibility.
- Positive identity formation: Exploration of Real Self and positive goal setting
- Enhancement of self-worth: Actions that enhance self-respect and development of pro-social habits change how participants see themselves.
- Decreasing hedonism: Participants learn to delay gratification and control of pleasure-seeking behavior.

Three-and-one-half-year outcomes for the BSHS Behavior Management Program

Between January of 2000 and June of 2003, 49 regular education students and 37 special education students at BSHS who would otherwise have been suspended entered the program. Students who refused to participate in the Behavior Management Program were suspended and not included in the study.

Administrator risk ratings for students referred to the Behavior Management Program

BSHS administrators rated each student on risk of high school failure or dropout utilizing the following scale: 1 = Low Risk, 2 = Moderate Risk, 3 = Moderate-High Risk, 4 = High Risk; 5 = Extremely High Risk. Mean risk level for 49 regular education students referred was 4.45 (high-extremely high risk). Mean risk level for 37 special education students referred was 4.28 (high-extremely high risk).

Figure 1 shows 3.5-year outcomes for these 86 students. 59 students referred to the Behavior Management Program in Billings during a 3.5-year period either graduated successfully or were still attending BSHS. Significantly, 14 high-risk students referred to SRT® had left BSHS, but were still positively engaged in the system through transfer to an alternative school, completing a GED, entering Job Corps, or entering substance abuse or mental health treatment. Only 13 of these high risk youth who entered SRT® had dropped out or been expelled during the study period.

Cost/benefit analysis of SRT® and MRT® implementation

In Montana, schools receive \$2,200 per semester based upon student headcount. Independent of program value in terms of positive impact on students' lives, the Behavior Management Program at BSHS has been a success in purely budgetary terms as shown in Table 1 summarizing program costs and school revenue retained. Revenue retention figures encompass only the 59 students who remained in attendance at BSHS, and exclude those who obtained a GED, transferred to other schools, went to substance abuse treatment, were expelled or dropped out.

Decreasing the BSHS dropout rate

The yearly percentage of students leaving Billings Senior High School during the school year has steadily decreased from 7.5 percent (148 students) to 5.3 percent (101 students) over the three school years since the initiation of the Behavior Management Program. Yearly figures are shown in Table 2.

Figure 1. Three-and-one-half year outcomes for students referred to the behavior management program

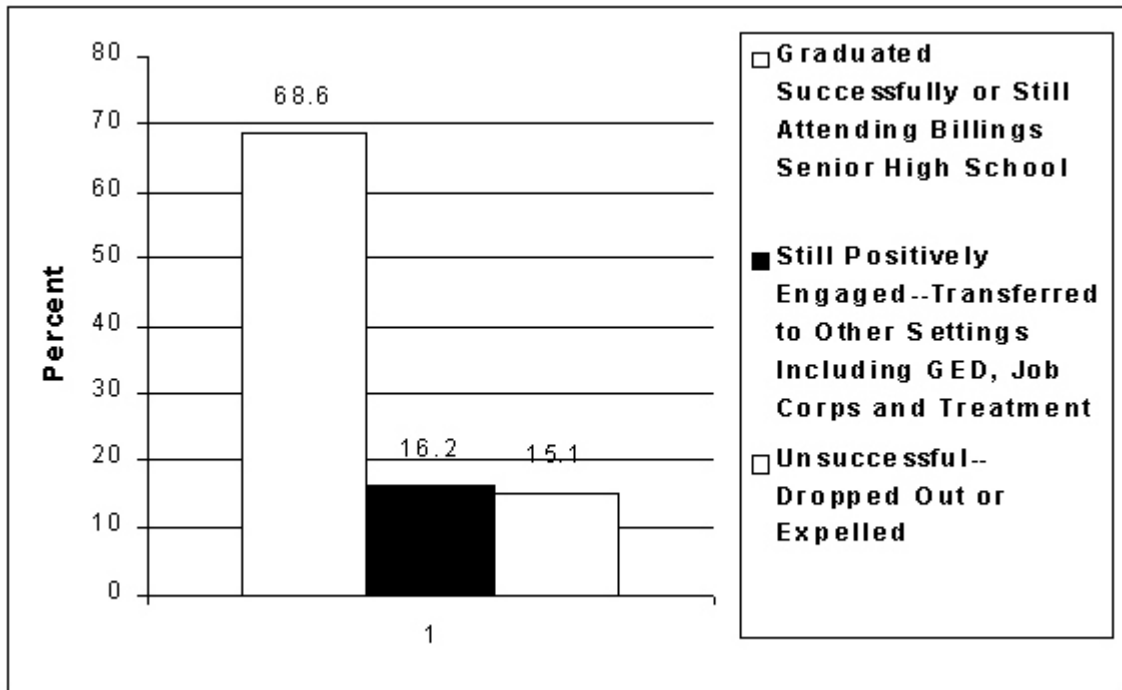


Table 1. Cost/benefit analysis for Billings Behavior Management Program

Senior High Costs and Revenue Retained	Debits and Credits
Total Behavior Management Program Cost to serve 86 students (not including school staff salaries and researcher time)	(\$15,050)
School revenue retained for an average of two semesters for each student @ \$2,200 per semester state reimbursement rate.	\$259,600
Net Revenue Retained	\$244,550

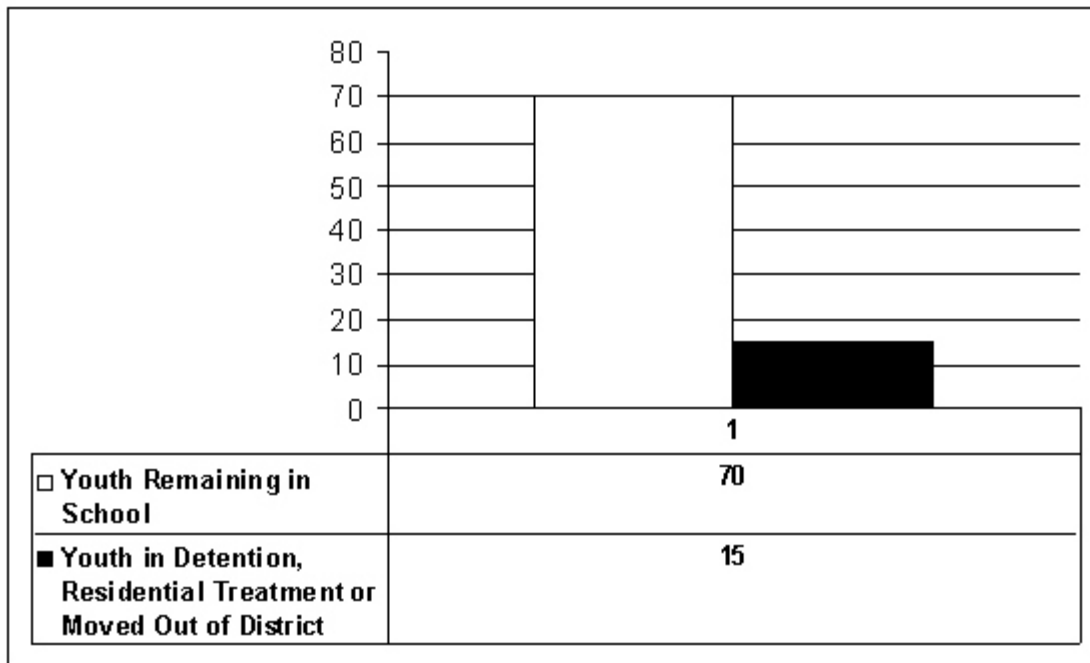
Table 2. Billings Senior High School Dropout Rate 1999-2003

School Year	Dropouts/Total Students Registered	Yearly Dropout Percentage
1999-2000	148/1975	7.5
2000-2001	138/1980	6.9
2001-2002	101/1903	5.3
2002-2003	101/1903	5.3

**Durango, Colorado SRT® Results with At-risk Youth**

After reviewing BSHS research findings and program curricula, Durango, Colorado School District Director of Special Programs Sandra Francik implemented SRT® for truant students in the Durango alternative school program, and for at-risk high school students at Durango High School (DHS) during January of 2002. Diane Cohen Bruck, a family counselor in the community, in collaboration with the school, probation, juvenile court, and parents of students referred to SRT® classes at DHS, provided year-round community support services to students at risk and their parents. Figure 2 illustrates that of the 85 students served through June of 2003 who were considered at high risk for dropout or expulsion, 70 (82.4 percent) remained in school.

Figure 2. Durango, Colorado school retention results



**Spokane, Washington SRT® Results with At-risk Youth**

The Spokane project arose from a collaboration of the Washington Department of Corrections, the Spokane Schools, Law Enforcement, Parents, and Community Leaders in the Edgecliff Community of Spokane. Following the initiative of Nancy Jahns, a community corrections officer in the Washington Department of Corrections, this consortium of stakeholders applied for and won “Weed and Seed” funding from the U.S. Department of Justice during 2002. The Weed and Seed strategy is a two-pronged approach to crime control and prevention. Law enforcement agencies and prosecutors cooperate in “weeding out” criminals from the target area. “Seeding” brings prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization services to the area (U.S. Department of Justice 2003). During September 2003, fourteen SRT® classes were offered to 165 at-risk students in pilots at two high schools. Department of Corrections volunteers trained in MRT® assisted school facilitators.

**Ferris High School SRT® Pilot Results**

Ferris High School (FHS), a mainstream school in Spokane with a student population of 1,800, adopted the curriculum as a behavioral intervention program. Carole Meyer, an Assistant Principal at FHS at that time, invited 65 sophomores with four or more high school academic failures, large numbers of absences, or juvenile justice involvement, to attend SRT® classes. SRT® trained FHS faculty members volunteered to spend one before-school planning period weekly teaching these classes. SRT® classes were held before school one day per week, and student attendance was voluntary. In first quarter results, FHS reported a reduction in short term suspensions by one third and the lowest student net loss in the District, with the second to highest student count. Second quarter results showed significant additional retention success, with a net gain of 3 students for the quarter, compared to net losses of between 9-30 students in other district high schools.

#### Spokane Valley High School SRT® Pilot Results

Spokane Valley High School (SVHS), an alternative school, provided SRT® to all 100 students attending full-time as a social-emotional skill development program. SVHS incoming Principal Larry Bush indicated the school was well known in prior years for violence, law enforcement contacts, and unruly student behavior. Teachers and counselors at the school reported that during the 2002-2003 school year there were 2-3 fights weekly on campus and student arrests were commonplace. Principal Bush reported that during the 2002-2003 school year, only five students reached full credit status, although a high percentage of students attended school. Principal Bush concluded that as attendance was high and credits earned low, students must be engaged in “every activity in school other than academics.”

After integrating daily SRT® classes into the school, Principal Bush reported that the school had no reported fights on campus during the 2003-2004 school year. He noted an increased willingness in students to support and protect one another, transforming a previously “hostile environment,” and supporting school achievement. The Principal reported that the school’s student retention increased, and 59 students reached full credit status (a 1,180 percent increase from the previous year). He reported only five drug related issues during the school year, and three law enforcement contacts (two were non-school related). Principal Bush stated that SRT® classes had the highest attendance rate among classes offered. He credited SRT® classes in large part for the school’s successes.

#### **Georgia Alternative Program SRT® Results with At-risk Youth**

The CrossRoads Alternative Program in Eastanolee, Georgia serves at-risk middle and high school students from Franklin, Stephens and Banks Counties in Northeastern Georgia. Multi-disciplinary staff members during the 2003-2004 school year served 69 active students referred to the Program primarily for behavioral and attendance problems at their home schools. Each student is required to participate in SRT® daily. Director Joyce Beckett uses SRT® as a daily curriculum to reinforce the program’s philosophy of accountability. Beginning with fall semester 2003, each CrossRoads student completes and passes SRT® class requirements prior to transitioning back to his/her home school. Those who do not complete and pass SRT® are required to remain for another semester at CrossRoads until this expectation is met.

#### CrossRoads program risk profile

The School Success Profile (SSP) (Bowen & Richman 2003) for students at CrossRoads, a questionnaire completed by students, was conducted by the Jordan Institute for Families at the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in December of 2003. Those results provided an “Individual Adaptation” and “Social Environment” Profile for 47 of 69 (68.1 percent) students at the school who completed self-assessment questionnaires during the survey. Key Social Environment and Individual Adaptation risks and assets were identified in each of the following areas surveyed.

Table 3. Key social environment and individual adaptation risks and assets at CrossRoads Alternative Program

Social environment risks	Individual adaptation profile risks and assets
Neighbor youth behavior School satisfaction Teacher support Friends support Friend behavior Home academic environment School behavior expectations No social environment assets were identified for students in the survey.	School engagement Trouble avoidance Asset--Happiness Asset--Academic Performance

A random sample of 15 students was drawn from the 112 students who attended CrossRoads between August 2003 and February of 2004. Students who had attended less than 30 days were eliminated from the sample. Table 4 shows a demographic comparison between the SSP and CrossRoads samples.

Table 4 Demographic characteristics of SSP and CrossRoads samples

Demographic Information	School Success Profile (SSP)	February 2003 Random
Average age (years)	14	14.6
Current grade	6-12	7-10
Gender (percent males and females)	Male 81 Female 19	Male 80 Female 20
Race/Ethnicity (in percent)	White 49 Black 43 Multiracial 0	White 53.3 Black 43.0 Multiracial 6.7
Free/Reduced Lunch (percent)	70	Not assessed
Criminal Justice Involvement (percent)	Not assessed	40
Special education (percent)	Not assessed	20
Rating of degree of previous school failures	Not assessed	Very great

CrossRoads Director Joyce Beckett rated each student on five dynamic risk variables at two points in time: (a) how the student was when he/she entered CrossRoads, and (b) how the student is currently, or was at the time that he/she returned to his/her home school, withdrew from school, or moved. Ratings were made utilizing the following scale: 1 = Low Risk, 2 = Some Risk, 3 = Moderate Risk, 4 = High Risk, 5 = Very High Risk. Students were rated on five risk variables.

- Student's attitude toward school authorities
- Degree to which student takes responsibility for self
- The degree to which the student is manipulative

- Student’s level of academic effort
- Student’s depth of truancy problems

These findings (Table 5) suggest CrossRoads is having a positive impact in reducing school risk variables through the combination of school philosophy, committed staff, and utilizing the SRT® curriculum with all students every day. The greatest impacts suggested here are improved attitudes toward school authorities, elevated level of academic effort, and taking increased responsibility for self. Least impacts are suggested in student manipulative behavior and in truancy.

Table 5. CrossRoads Pre-Post Reductions of Risk Variables

Variable	Pre Mean	Post Mean	Reduction in Risk
Attitude toward authority	3.13	2.13	-1
Takes responsibility for self	3.33	2.87	-0.46
Manipulativeness	3.27	3.07	-0.2
Level of academic effort	3.5	2.67	-0.83
Depth of truancy problems	2.27	2.13	-0.14

Monthly student progress ratings

Using standardized SRT® facilitator rating forms, one CrossRoads SRT® facilitator rated students in his class monthly during the fall semester on 10 risk factors targeted in SRT®. Rating scale is 1-10 where 1 = Very Little risk and 10 = Very Much risk. The rated variables include,

- Motivation to change
- Takes responsibility for self
- Takes constructive action
- Follows the rules of school and society
- Maintains abstinence from drugs and alcohol
- Participates constructively in class
- Shows positive social attitudes
- Developing positive support system
- Displays regret for negative choices
- Makes realistic plans for the future

Teacher ratings of students on the rated variables appear in Table 6. These SRT® class progress ratings suggest that students go through an initial honeymoon period as they engage with the cognitive behavioral curriculum. Coming to terms with the program requires changing both thinking and behavior, and participants appear to go through some discouragement and behavioral backsliding during the second month of the curriculum.

Table 6. CrossRoads SRT® class monthly average student progress ratings

September mean rating	October mean rating	November mean rating	December mean rating
5.42	4.43	5.58	6.19

## **Michigan HS and JHS SRT® Results with At-risk Youth**

Because of her positive experience utilizing MRT® in her work with at-risk youth in schools and community, youth advocate Karla Rae Duffey and her staff conducted a pilot project utilizing SRT® with 18 at-risk youth at Ackerson Lake Optional High School in Napoleon, MI, and with 10 at-risk youth at Western Junior High Options in Jackson, MI during school year 2003-2004. The projects were funded by *LifeWays*, the Jackson and Hillsdale Counties Mental Health Managed Care Organization.

### **Ackerson Lake Optional High School SRT® Results**

The 18 students referred to SRT® had been permanently expelled from regular high schools for verbal or physical aggression, disrespect to teachers and administrators, theft, truancy and drug use. Ms. Duffey reported that students attending the class were extremely negative and resistive at the outset. Gradually, students became engaged. Ms. Duffey reported the following results at Ackerson Lake.

- Sixty-one percent of referred students improved in at least two of the three areas tracked for improvement: grade point average, unexcused absences, and suspensions.
- Twelve of 18 (67 percent) of referred students decreased or maintained their prior level of suspensions.
- Of the 12 students who decreased or maintained previous numbers of suspensions, there was a 96 percent decrease in suspensions from the second to the third trimester.
- There was an 88 percent increase in students' self-reported wish to change how their lives were going.
- Teachers' ratings of these students' desire to change during the year increased 129 percent.
- Teachers' ratings of these students' life satisfaction increased 78 percent during the school year.

### **Western Optional Junior High School SRT® Results**

Western Optional Junior High School serves youth attending an alternative school after being suspended from Western Junior High School in Jackson, MI. Reasons for suspension included fighting, yelling at teachers, theft, truancy, smoking, and drug use. Referred students were offered SRT® for one hour, three days per week, during the regular school day. As with the SRT® participants at Ackerson Lake Optional High School, these students were initially very resistive to participation, but gradually became engaged. Ms. Duffey reported the following results at Western Optional JHS.

- GPAs for SRT® participants increased from 1.93 to 2.32 during the third trimester (a 20 percent increase).
- Hourly suspensions decreased 50 percent from first to third trimester.
- Students' pre-post self-reports of wish to change how their lives were going increased 39 percent.
- Despite significant emotional, behavioral and family challenges, SRT® participants reported a pre-post 31 percent increase in well being.
- Teacher pre-post ratings of SRT® students' wish to change increased 119 percent during the year.

### **Prescott, AZ High School and Middle School SRT® Pilot Results**

During Spring, 2004, Diane Cohen Bruck provided SRT® to 14 at-risk 9<sup>th</sup> graders from the Prescott Unified School District three days per week. During Summer, 2004, Ms. Bruck provided SRT® to 22 sixth, seventh and eighth graders from the school district. Additionally, during Summer of 2004, Ms. Bruck provided the SRT® parent support curriculum to 24 parents of the Junior High School students. Ms. Cohen reported the following youth and family impacts pre and post SRT® intervention for students and parents based upon youth and facilitator ratings: (a) student communication skills increased; (b) quality of parent communication

with youth improved; (c) open family communication increased; (d) family problem solving increased; and (e) student individual problem solving increased.

### **SRT® Issues for Future Research**

Formal research evaluation utilizing experimental or quasi-experimental design is needed in order to address a number of SRT® research and implementation issues. The authors are pursuing federal grant funding to support research studies designed to provide further information regarding the following critical questions:

- Does SRT® independently result in reductions in school dropouts as compared to appropriate comparison groups?
- What objectively measurable changes occur in student behavior and academic performance during and after SRT® participation vs. matched comparison groups not receiving this program?
- What are the personality characteristics and motivations of students who either respond positively or fail to respond to SRT®?
- Does the SRT® parent support curriculum lead to objectively measurable changes in family atmosphere, student and parent functioning, and student attitudes and school behavior?
- What facilitator and school environment variables are associated with changes in school dropouts, and how are these variables impacted either positively or negatively by SRT® training and implementation?

This review of preliminary results using SRT® with at-risk students in differing program configurations in six school districts suggest these curricula may have utility in reducing school dropouts and potentially enhancing in-school behavior and academic performance. Through extensive field testing and preliminary research evaluations on outcomes using SRT®, program objectives have been supported. Positive engagement for students with a caring adult, and structured cognitive behavioral curricula delivered during the school day appear to be a promising preventive intervention to interrupt school dropouts and decrease school failures.

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### Biography

**Lane Lasater**, Ph.D., is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and President of Character Development Systems, L.L.C., providing program consultation, training, and program oversight for school and corrections prevention projects in Colorado, Wyoming, Georgia, Montana, Louisiana, Illinois, Washington. Dr. Lasater has worked for 35 years in providing services and oversight in human service systems that provide mental health and substance abuse treatment and correctional supervision. From 1996-2000, Dr. Lasater served as the Director of Correctional Program Development for BI Incorporated of Boulder, Colorado. Dr. Lasater provided professional direction and oversight to the provision of supervision and rehabilitation services to 60,000 offenders daily through BI's 110 field offices.

**Kenneth D. Robinson**, Ed.D., is a Licensed Professional Counselor, and Chief Executive Officer of Character Development Systems, L.L.C. Dr. Robinson is also President of Correctional Counseling Incorporated of Memphis, TN, a company providing cognitive restructuring programming used in corrections in 43 states. He co-developed Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT®), a cognitive behavioral intervention for corrections. Since 1987, 400,000 adult and juvenile offenders in corrections have been through the program, and research results have demonstrated in general a 30 percent reduction in recidivism. Dr. Robinson served as Consultant to Bureau of Justice Assistance from 1985-1999. He has been a member of the National Drug Court Institute Faculty from 1998-Present and provides training to drug court professionals and to the National Judicial College.

**Tom Willis**, M.A., is Associate Principal of Billings Senior High School. Mr. Willis finished his B.A. in education in 1972 and started teaching in Hardin Montana. After 3 years, he moved to Missoula Montana and taught for 5 years. He then moved to Billings West High School where he taught 16 years. During the course of his teaching career Mr. Willis has taught Math, Industrial Arts, P.E. and coached football, wrestling and track. In 1997 Mr. Willis finished his Masters degree in education and became Assistant Principal at Billings Senior High School, a position he held for four years. Mr. Willis has been the Associate Principal at Billings Senior High School for the remainder of his 33 years in the field.

**Carole L. Meyer**, M.A., is Principal of Havermale High School in Spokane serving over 900 students. Ms Meyer also directs four alternative programs in the District. Previously, Ms. Meyer served as an assistant principal at Ferris high school in Spokane, Washington with over 1800 students, and oversaw discipline and attendance issues for that population. In this role she experienced first hand the negative effects of drugs, alcohol, child abuse, teen pregnancy, crime and mental health issues in teens and their parents. Ms. Meyer has taken the lead in implementing several school prevention programs. This is her 17th year in education, including 9 years as a counselor and 5 years as a Special Education teacher.

**Nancy R. Jahns**, has been active in leading community initiatives since the early 1970s. Ms. Jahns has been a Community Corrections Officer, Program Facilitator, and DOC Offender Family Community Project Liaison with the Washington Department of Corrections for 11 years. In these roles, Ms. Jahns helped to pioneer innovative programs for both women and offender families including the first inmate mother/baby program, a mother/child weekend visitation program, and cognitive behavioral and relapse prevention programming. Ms. Jahns has co-authored numerous grants, and helped to design the statewide award-winning Department of Justice Weed and Seed Strategy, mobilizing citizens of an impoverished and deteriorating neighborhood.

**Larry Bush**, M.A., is the principal of West Valley City School and Spokane Valley High School. Mr. Bush has worked in the West Valley School District located in Spokane Washington for the past 25 years, 15 of those as an administrator. He has developed three new concept schools during that time along with facilitating a traditional elementary. City school was developed in 1998 and has been the recipient of grants accumulating over \$300,000 including a three- year Gates grant. In the 2003 school year, City School was the Magna Award recipient and honored at the National School Board Association conference in San Francisco. Over 400 visitors tour the program annually with three replication programs developed in the past two years throughout the state. Each school has adopted a consistent research-based instructional approach based on shared beliefs about teaching and learning.

**Joyce A. Beckett**, Ph.D., is Director of the CrossRoads Alternative Program, which serves chronically disruptive and expelled students from Stephens, Franklin and Banks Counties in NE Georgia. Dr. Beckett's work with at-risk children has resulted in presentations at state and national conventions on innovative strategies that work with these students. She was recently profiled in the Jordan Institute Annual Report (University of North Carolina School of Social Work) for her work with the School Success Profile, which her program uses in conjunction with Social Responsibility Training. She has co-authored a chapter on teacher empowerment in *Prelude to a New Millennium: Yearbook of the Southern Regional Council of School Administrator* (Vol. 1, Number 1).

**Diane Cohen Bruck** is a youth and family specialist who has worked in the fields of prevention and intervention for 26 years. She is a National Substance Abuse Counselor and Certified Intervention Specialist. Ms. Bruck holds a B.A. in Sociology and Business Administration. She is trained in psychodrama and conflict resolution. Ms. Bruck has worked extensively with juvenile drug court systems in New Mexico and Colorado is committed to a systems approach to youth and family issues.

**Karla Rae Duffey** is a Registered Social Worker and Executive Director of The Difference, a non-profit organization in Jackson, Michigan dedicated to serving youth and families. Ms. Duffey has worked with youth and families in the human services field for the past 24 years, including work in residential settings, group facilitation, training professional staff, and community case management. Ms. Duffey's professional objective is mobilizing community members, businesses, agencies, parents, and youth to prevent school dropout, substance abuse and related individual and community challenges.