Evaluation of the Restorative Accountable Youth Solutions (RAYS) Program[1]

Local Evaluation Report for Proposition 64 Public Health & Safety Grant
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Authors:
Marlene Mahurin | Nevada County Superintendent of Schools
Gino Acevedo | University of California San Diego
Shu-Hong Zhu | University of California San Diego

Grantee:
Nevada County Superintendent of Schools
380 Crown Point Circle, Grass Valley, CA, 95945

Project Director:
Marlene Mahurin
RAYS Project Director, Nevada County Superintendent of Schools
mmahurin@nevco.org
(530) 478-6400, Ext. 2031

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[1] RAYS was previously known as the "Peer Solutions" program

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Acronyms

RAYS = Restorative Accountable Youth Solutions
ATS = Alternative to suspension
ADSS = Alcohol and Drug Safety Skills
ATS = alternative to suspension
YA = youth advocates
MYHB = Mapping Youth Health Behavior
CHKS = California Healthy Kids Survey
TUPE = Tobacco Use Prevention Education
NCSOS = Nevada County Superintendent of Schools
UCSD = University of California San Diego
CDE = California Department of Education

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Restorative Accountable Youth Solutions (RAYS) program was established as an alternative to suspension program in Nevada County. The program sought to address the disproportionate substance use and suspension rates reported in Nevada County schools through a restorative practices approach. The main goals of the RAYS program were to (1) reduce suspension rates, (2) reduce youth marijuana and overall substance use, and (3) increase access to substance use and drug treatment services for youth.

Methods

A comprehensive process and outcome evaluation of the RAYS program was conducted focusing on key measures that aimed to address the original goals and objectives. This evaluation was informed by quantitative (i.e., activity logs, surveys, discipline data) and qualitative data (i.e., focus groups, interviews, open-text survey responses) collected from May 2021 through October 2024. A pre/post multi-method approach informed the assessment of individual and school-level impacts of the RAYS program.

Key Findings

- Suspension rates decreased from 11.9% during the 2018-19 academic year to 7.4% in 2023-24.
- Among students who successfully exited RAYS (n=127), 15.0% were involved in a subsequent disciplinary incident.
- Over one-third (35.6%) of RAYS enrollees who reported any substance use reported a decrease in use compared to when they first entered the program.
- Approximately three-quarters (75.2%) of participants who were referred to RAYS from a drug-related incident were provided with substance use and drug treatment services.
- Outside of the anticipated goals, RAYS also reported positive outcomes pertaining to student awareness and access to resources.

Conclusions

Overall, the presence of RAYS at the four school sites was associated with a decrease in suspension rates and substance use. The RAYS program offered direct linkage to substance use and drug treatment services, with a majority of students who were referred from a drug-related incident receiving these services. While causal inferences are not possible, due to the absence of a control group, findings from this evaluation are indicative of the positive impacts on individual substance use behaviors, school discipline, and service acquisition.

1. Project Background

1.1 Setting

The Restorative Accountable Youth Solutions (RAYS) program was established as an alternative to suspension (ATS) in four schools under the purview of the Nevada County Superintendent of Schools (NCSOS). Nevada County is situated in the western Sierra Nevada Foothills, approximately 60 miles northeast of the greater Sacramento metropolitan area. The region consists of two large towns, Nevada City and Grass Valley, surrounded by smaller communities with a total population of approximately 100,000 residents.[1] Nevada County's location in the foothills provides a natural setting for wide-spread cannabis cultivation. In 2017, the Intermountain region of California, where Nevada County is located, produced approximately 4.5 million pounds of cannabis, second to the North Coast which produced approximately 5.5 million.[2] Additionally, the high prevalence of industry- and privately-owned cannabis cultivation operations ties into community-level acceptance of cannabis use and access, among both adults and youth in the region.

The introduction of Proposition 64 in California provided a legal avenue for further integrating the industries of cannabis cultivation and distribution in communities across Nevada County. This in turn allowed for the construction of mostly legal, state-compliant cultivation operations and marijuana dispensaries in both Nevada City and Grass Valley, the two largest towns in the region. Regardless of new state-sponsored regulations and monitoring of cannabis cultivation and sales, there already existed a low-cost "black" market in Nevada County, an avenue most accessible to legally "underage" populations who would otherwise not be able to purchase products in a dispensary.

This is reflected in the high rates of substance use reported by students in Nevada County schools. In the most recent reports of California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) data, 8% of 7th graders, 18% of 9th graders, and 38% of 11th graders reported any current substance use. In comparison, state-level rates stood at 4% of 7th graders, 10% of 9th graders and 19% of 11th graders.[3] During the 2019-2021 data collection period, 3% of 7th graders, 11% of 9th graders, and 26% of 11th graders in Nevada County schools reported current marijuana use.[3] For reference, 2% of 7th graders, 6% of 9th graders, and 12% of 11th graders across California reported current marijuana use.[3] Considering vape use, 5% of 7th graders, 12% of 9th graders, and 22% of 11th graders reported current use.[3] In comparison, 2% of 7th graders, 6% of 9th graders, and 10% of 11th graders across California reported current vape use.

Similarly, Nevada County schools have also reported higher suspension rates when compared to the state average (4.2% vs. 3.5% in 2018-19).[4] Prior research has linked traditional suspension approaches to increased absences, decreased academic achievement, and increased risk of entering the juvenile justice system.[5] Furthermore, suspensions have been found to disproportionately impact at-risk students and students of color.[6,7] Students who are suspended may be at higher risk of dropping out or falling behind academically, factors that have been associated with poor health outcomes in adulthood.[5]

The need for RAYS was rooted in the high rates of substance use and suspension reported in Nevada County schools. Additionally, the high levels of cannabis acceptance in

Nevada County prompted NCSOS to explore strategies for addressing cannabis use behaviors and cannabis-related disciplinary incidents via restorative approaches. Previous intervention options offered in Nevada County schools were limited in the services provided to students and were not accessible to all youth. Furthermore, limited coordination between the school staff and the professionals providing intervention services resulted in inconsistent service referral and acquisition. As a result, schools defaulted to traditional, more punitive forms of discipline such as at-home suspension, on-campus intervention/suspension, or expulsion.

1.2 Restorative justice approaches

The RAYS program sought to provide a more restorative approach to addressing disciplinary incidents in a subset of Nevada County schools. Following the philosophy of restorative justice, RAYS was developed as an alternative approach to punitive discipline in schools. Restorative justice is rooted in South Pacific and North American indigenous cultural values.[8] The aims of restorative approaches are to address conflict or incidents via self-reflection, community cohesiveness, harm reparation, relationship strengthening, and reintegration.[9,10] Originally implemented in criminal justice systems, restorative justice efforts were eventually employed in schools in the 1990s.[11] Critical components of restorative justice approaches or programs usually include restorative circles or conferences and peer-to-peer mediations.[8,9] These components provide settings for individuals to reflect on an incident and discuss steps for healing and moving forward.

1.3 Similar efforts in Nevada County

To the knowledge of the RAYS program coordinators and the external evaluators, there were no similar programs being implemented in Nevada County. The NCSOS is a recipient of the California Department of Education's Tobacco Use Prevention Education (TUPE) grant, which aims to prevent and reduce tobacco use among students in California schools. However, the NCSOS TUPE program's main aims are to address tobacco-specific behaviors and does not focus on restorative practices or alternatives to punitive discipline. Additionally, while some restorative approaches (e.g., restorative circles) have been implemented in the past, there have not been structured programs adopted by Nevada County schools. The RAYS program is one of the first comprehensive, structured programs to address cannabis use and school discipline using restorative justice approaches in Nevada County.

1.4 RAYS activities and services

Core elements of RAYS included alternative to suspension (ATS), substance use support, and restorative practices. The ATS element played a critical role in providing an alternative to punitive disciplinary approaches (i.e., suspension). This gave both students and school administrators who handle disciplinary incidents an option other than suspension, on-campus intervention, and expulsion. Students referred for ATS were met with the other two elements of RAYS, substance use support (where appropriate) and restorative practices. These elements took the form of several activities, which are outlined in the next section.

1.5 Participant-based components

All RAYS activities and services were participant-oriented, meaning that all components of the program involved participants. RAYS activities included the following:

- **Restorative Circles**: A group-based, peer-led discussion in which the referred student (student who committed the offense) and a team of 5-6 youth advocates (YAs) discussed the incident and next steps. During this discussion, the YAs took turns asking the referred student questions about academics, hobbies, home life, why they were involved in the incident, and how they think they could repair harm. At the end, the YAs worked with the student to develop a Restorative Plan which outlined the activities that the student was required to complete before successfully exiting the program. This plan included any combination of the following activities.
- **Harm Reduction Classes**: Also known as the Alcohol and Other Drugs Safety Skills class, harm reduction classes aimed to equip students with knowledge of the harms of drug use and how to identify "harmful" use behaviors. Information from the *Safety First*[2] curriculum, Stanford Toolkit [CITE], and YouTube were used to inform the material covered in these classes.
- **Community Engagement Project**: Using answers to questions on hobbies and interests that came up during the restorative circle, YAs brainstormed ideas for community engagement activities that the referred student could complete. YAs then worked with the student to identify a project of interest to give back to the school community in a positive way and help the student reconnect with interests other than substance use. Examples of activities included building a garden box, leading a jewelry-making class, or creating an art installation in the school library.
- **Harm Reparation**: Depending on the incident, YAs worked with the referred student to identify any individuals (e.g., staff, other students) who may have been impacted by the incident. RAYS program coordinators would then schedule a time for the impacted individual and referred student to meet to discuss the incident and ways to repair any harm done and steps for restoring relationships. Structured conversation "cards" with questions based in Restorative Practices were used to guide these discussions.
- **Counseling Services**: General and/or substance use-related counseling was also offered to students as part of their Restorative Plan or as an optional service. This included structured appointments (e.g., 3-session series) with the RAYS counselor or on an as-needed basis.
- **External Service Referral**: Some students were referred to external services (e.g., therapy, rehabilitation) on an as-needed basis. This was determined by the RAYS counselor in consultation with the student.
- **Future Circle**: Students attended one of their peers' future restorative circles and sat in as a YA.

1.5.1 Target population

Four school sites were selected to participate in the RAYS program. These sites were targeted as they serve the largest student populations across all NCSOS schools. The four sites

[2] https://med.stanford.edu/halpern-felsher-reach-lab/preventions-interventions/Safety-First.html

included one middle school, two comprehensive high schools, and one continuation high school. The target population included middle or high school students enrolled in one of the four target school sites who had committed an offense and were referred for disciplinary action (e.g., suspension, on-campus intervention). Targeted offenses included drug-related incidents (e.g., caught with cannabis product at school); however, the program was also offered to students who had committed other types of offenses (e.g., defiance, truancy, vandalism). Ultimately, referral to the RAYS program was at the discretion of school administration and RAYS program coordinators.

1.5.2 Participant eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria for referral and enrollment in the RAYS program included:

- Enrolled 7th-12th grader in one of four participating school sites
- Have committed an offense and referred for disciplinary action
- Referred to RAYS by a school administrator
- Recommended for enrollment by RAYS program coordinator
- Voluntarily choose to enroll in RAYS and complete a program plan

1.5.3 Process for determining services

Figure 1 outlines the typical process that a student may have gone through when first enrolling in RAYS. Initially, the student would have been referred to a school administrator for disciplinary action following an offense. Depending on the situation, the administrator would offer either suspension or RAYS as an ATS to the student. Should the student choose RAYS, they would meet with the program's Restorative Practices Coordinator. After meeting with the coordinator and going through an overview of the program and next steps, the student would schedule their restorative circle. During the circle, the student would meet with a team of YAs and develop their Restorative Plan consisting of the offered activities: harm reduction class, community engagement project, harm reparation, counseling, external service referral, and/or sitting on a future circle. A staff champion and student supporter (usually a YA) would also be assigned to the student to check in on their progress in completing their Restorative Plan components. Once the student completed the activities outlined in their Restorative Plan, they would meet with the program coordinator and be marked as a "successful completion".

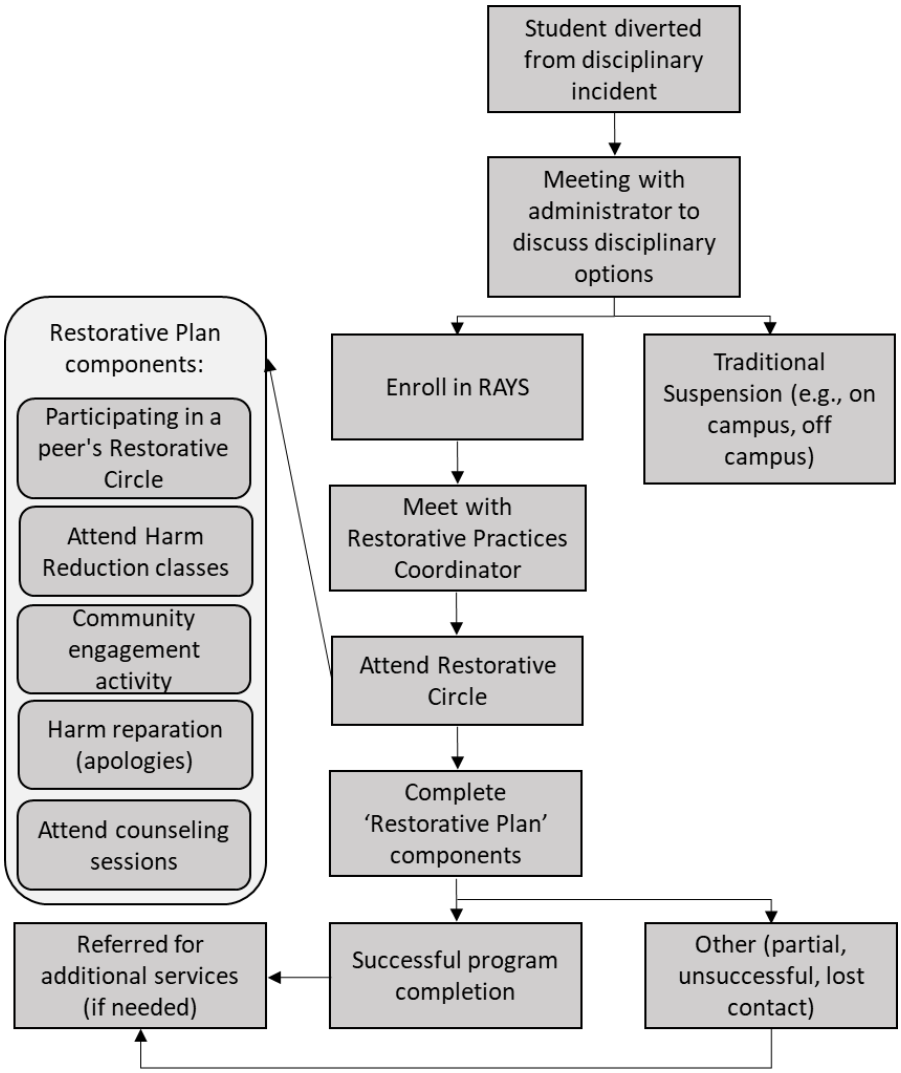


Figure 1. Flowchart of steps in RAYS enrollment and exit process

The process for identifying appropriate services depended on details that may have come up during the student's restorative circle. Generally, most students were required to complete a community engagement activity, counseling sessions, and harm reparation. Students referred from drug-related incidents were typically required to complete substance use counseling and harm reduction classes. However, activity selection was done on a case-by-case basis. For instance, a student may have been referred to RAYS for truancy, but during the restorative circle it was disclosed that they also vape or use marijuana. In this case, the YA team may recommend that the student also attend a harm reduction class and receive counseling for substance use.

1.6 Goals and objectives

Table 1 outlines the original goals and objectives that were proposed in the initial Project Work Plan of the grant proposal. These goals and objectives were tracked as part of the process and outcome evaluation which will be discussed in further detail in sections 2-4.

Table 1. Goals and objectives from the RAYS Project Work Plan

Goal 1: Reduce suspension rates at the four participating school sites.	
Objective A	Offending students referred for disciplinary action will be given the option to participate in RAYS by October 2021.
Objective B	Restorative circles/hearings will be piloted at the continuation high school by October 2021 and February 2022 for the three other target school sites. Trainings at the other three sites will be in January 2022.
Objective C	Drug-related suspension rates will have decreased by 20% by October 2024.
Objective D	The completion rate of the ATS program will be 75% by October 2024.
Goal 2: Reduce youth marijuana and substance use.	
Objective A	Students will have the opportunity to participate in a school-based substance use counseling program by October 2021.
Objective B	Collection of 150 pre- and post-surveys from participants in the harm reduction class by October 2024.
Objective C	Collection of pre- and post-surveys from students who participated in the RAYS program by October 2024.
Objective D	Recidivism rates (students recommitting an offense after exiting RAYS) will have decreased by 25% by October 2024.
Goal 3: Increase access to substance use and drug (SUD) treatment.	
Objective A	SUD treatment services will be offered to students at all four target schools.
Objective B	Treatment services and support will be promoted to ensure students know to access them when needed.
Objective C	SUD treatment will be offered to students participating in the RAYS program through both group and individual sessions.
Objective D	Students will be referred to more extensive SUD services outside of school as needed.
Objective E	100 students will have received SUD treatment by October 2024.

2. Process Evaluation Method and Design

2.1 Process evaluation research design

Researchers from the University of California San Diego (UCSD) were contracted as external evaluators for the RAYS program. The UCSD team designed and employed a multi-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach for the process evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected via multiple tracking tools developed and maintained by the UCSD team. Tracking tools were developed to record all aspects of the process of implementing RAYS components including program enrollments, individual and group activity participation, and completions.

2.2 Activity tracking

An online database was developed and maintained by the UCSD research team to collect all relevant activity (e.g., restorative circles, counseling sessions, training sessions) and case management data (e.g., enrollments, exits, activity participation). UCSD researchers worked with the RAYS team to customize database fields and tables to align with program needs. The database consisted of six modules – Student Profiles, General Activity Log, Enrollment Forms, Exit Forms, Demographic Forms, and Passphrases. RAYS staff members were trained and instructed to record all program data in the appropriate database modules. The RAYS team had the option of either entering data directly into the database or using a linked form which automatically uploaded entered data upon submission (see 'General Activity Log Form' in Appendices). Activity-level information collected via the General Activity Log (GAL) included date of implementation, staff email, school site, attendee type, participant count, activity name, activity detail, engagement level, and duration.

2.2.1 Participant activity tracking

Individual activity participation and progress in the program for enrollees was tracked using data from the GAL and case management modules (Student Profiles, Enrollment Forms, Exit Forms, Demographic Forms). Relevant enrollment information included the referral source, point of youth diversion, youth participation status, reason for referral, incident details, and enrollment date. The Exit Form collected data on the activities outlined in the students Restorative Plan, whether they completed all components, exit date, and exit reason. RAYS enrollees were assigned unique alphanumeric passphrases upon enrolling in the program. Passphrases for enrollees who participated in each activity were linked to the corresponding activity entry in the database, enabling the monitoring of individual participation. As such, the UCSD research team was able to report activity participation at an individual level.

2.2.2 Other activity tracking

Other activity types such as internal meetings, professional development, staff training sessions, school-wide events, and meetings with external evaluators were tracked via the GAL. This data was used to inform relevant process evaluation measures described in Table 2.

2.3 Process measures

Table 2. Process measures

Process measure	Data source	Frequency
# of trained staff	GAL	At time of event
# of staff training events	GAL	At time of event
# of trained YAs	GAL	At time of event
# of YA training events	GAL	At time of event
# of RAYS enrollments	Enrollment Form	At time of event
# of restorative circles	GAL	At time of event
# of RAYS enrollees who participated in a circle	GAL; Student Profile	At time of event
# of counseling sessions (general, SUD)	GAL	At time of event
# of RAYS enrollees who attended counseling sessions	GAL; Student Profile	At time of event
# of referrals to external services	GAL	At time of event
# of harm reduction classes	GAL	At time of event
# of harm reduction class participants	GAL	At time of event
# RAYS enrollees who attended a harm reduction class	GAL; Student Profile	At time of event
# RAYS informational presentations	GAL	At time of event
# RAYS staff meetings	GAL	At time of event
# RAYS-UCSD evaluation meetings	GAL	At time of event

2.4 Project oversight structure

The RAYS program coordinators, with support from NCSOS and the Nevada County TUPE program, were responsible for overseeing the implementation of all RAYS activities and services. RAYS program staff communicated and collaborated with leadership at participating sites to ensure components were implemented and programmatic needs were met. The RAYS team, in collaboration with NCSOS, established partnerships with community organizations for student referrals. RAYS staff were responsible for communicating with these organizations and maintaining relationships that would allow for continuous student referrals on an as-needed basis.

UCSD researchers were contracted by NCSOS to oversee evaluation efforts for both process and outcome measures. The UCSD team was responsible for the evaluation design, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, the research team assisted RAYS coordinators with data extraction and tabulation for reporting purposes.

Any decisions with respect to program adaptations were made by the RAYS program coordinators. NCSOS staff were consulted when needed or when county or district-level approval was required. Any changes made to the program were communicated to the UCSD research team to ensure the evaluation design aligned with any programmatic adaptations. Figure 2 provides a schematic representation of the communication stream between different entities involved with the RAYS project.

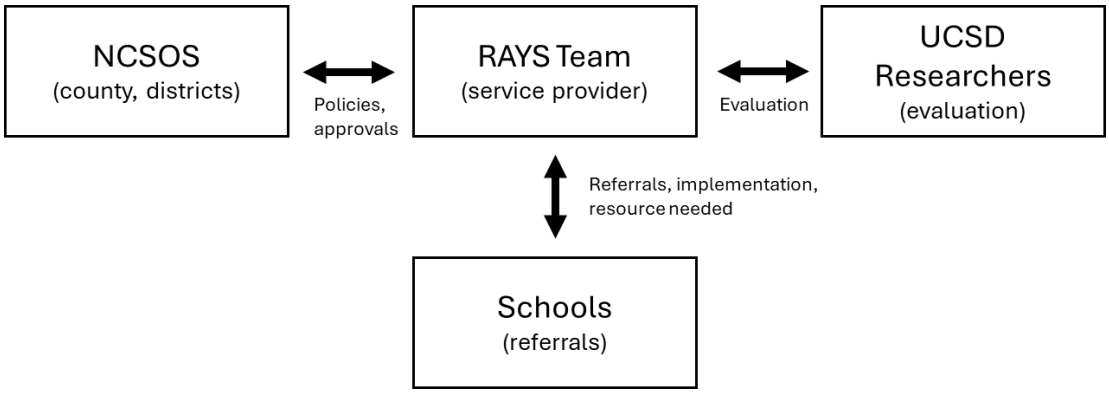


Figure 2. RAYS program oversight structure

2.5 Procedures for ensuring fidelity

Implementation fidelity was evaluated at baseline and periodic points throughout the evaluation period (May 2021 – October 2024). This was done by assessing whether the anticipated quantity of activities implemented, or services offered were met according to the timelines and goals outlined in the original Project Work Plan (Table 1). To ensure accurate data collection and recording, RAYS staff were trained by UCSD researchers on how to collect and record relevant process data in the designated tracking tools. The UCSD and RAYS teams met monthly to review accurate data collection procedures and discuss any discrepancies with reported data.

2.6 Quantitative and qualitative data analysis

Process measure data was recorded in the web-based tracking tool developed by the UCSD research team. These data were recorded in the GAL, Student Profile, Enrollment Form, Exit Form, Demographic Form, and Passphrase modules. Data from the case management modules (Student Profiles, Enrollment Forms, Exit Forms, Demographic Forms, Passphrases) and the GAL were exported from the online database and tabulated using Microsoft Excel®. Reports on program activities and enrollments, both at aggregate and individual levels, were created. These data were used to answer relevant process evaluation questions pertaining to case management and activity implementation. Individual-level data were used to monitor progress in the RAYS program, tabulate activity type and counts per enrollee, and to calculate completion rates. Analysis of case management data was also done via tabulation in Microsoft Excel®. Open-text entries in the GAL and case management logs were also used to answer evaluation questions pertaining to implementation fidelity, such as engagement levels among participants.

3. Outcome Evaluation Method and Design

3.1 Outcome evaluation research design

A pre/post multi-method evaluation design was used to assess for any changes in key outcome measures over time. The primary outcomes of interest included suspension rates, substance use behaviors, access to resources, and program completions. Suspension rates included overall suspensions and those that resulted from drug-related incidents. Recidivism was defined as the proportion of former RAYS enrollees involved in a subsequent disciplinary incident out of the total number of students who successfully exited the RAYS program. In addition, the evaluation aimed to assess the potential impacts of RAYS program activities on the substance use behaviors and attitudes of both RAYS participants and the general student body. The UCSD research team developed and deployed surveys for individual RAYS enrollees and the general student body at all four school sites. Discipline records for all school sites were used to calculate suspension and recidivism rates.

Aggregate discipline data was pulled from the California Department of Education's public data repository[12] and individual reports provided by the schools. Data to calculate the recidivism rate came from the Enrollment and Exit Forms in the web-based tracking tool and school suspension data. Students who had recommitted an offense or were referred for disciplinary action after successfully exiting RAYS were included in this calculation (i.e., number of former RAYS enrollees who recommitted an offense).

RAYS enrollees also participated in pre/post surveys – first upon enrollment (pre) and then upon exiting the program (post). The surveys assessed substance use behaviors, harm perceptions, self-responsibility, and resource awareness. The post-survey also included questions pertaining to program satisfaction. Participant-level data gathered via these surveys was used to assess individual-level impacts of the RAYS program on enrollee behaviors. The Mapping Youth Health Behavior (MYHB) survey, a proprietary survey developed by the UCSD research team, was administered to students at all four sites for a total of three survey cycles. Topics in the survey included demographics, substance use behaviors, attitudes and perceptions of use, and resource awareness. Students at all four sites were recruited to participate in this web-based survey, which was administered during school in a designated class.

A total of 3 staff interviews, 2 focus groups with youth advocates, and 1 focus group with enrollees were held. The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured encompassing topics pertaining to experiences and perceptions of the RAYS program and aspects of the program that could be improved. Staff interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom while student focus groups were done in-person at the school sites. Both interviews and focus groups were recorded for quality purposes.

A time series analysis of GAL and Enrollment/Exit Form data was conducted to examine changes in activity implementation and program enrollments over the course of evaluation period (May 2021 to October 2024). For survey data, the research team compiled, cleaned, and analyzed all data to inform the overall evaluation. RAYS program coordinators and schools were provided with "summary" profiles which highlighted key survey results (e.g., cannabis use, tobacco use, vape use, mental health, school connectedness). The UCSD research team

reviewed these results with RAYS program coordinators to inform program adaptations and the assessments of goals. Where requested, presentations were also given to school staff.

3.2 Evaluation questions

Goal 1: Reduce suspension rates at the four schools selected for this proposal.	
Objectives	**Evaluation Questions**
Objective A: By October of 2021 offending students will be given the option of participating in an Alternative to Suspension Program.	1) Did student awareness of the RAYS program increase as an alternative to suspension? 2) How many students opted for the RAYS program over other options (e.g. traditional suspension)? Compared to the total number of students with suspendable infractions?
Objective B: By October of 2021 Restorative Circles (aka Peer Solutions Circles) will begin at Silver Springs High School (pilot school); By February of 2022 Restorative Circles/Hearings will begin at the remaining 3 sites.	1) Did the pilot circles at SSH reveal any areas for improvement, need for additional resources, etc.? 2) Were peer advocates properly trained for their roles in the RAYS circles? 3) Were staff members properly trained for their roles in the RAYS circles?
Objective C: By October of 2024 Suspension rates will have decreased by 20%.	1) Did the overall number of suspensions decrease (substance use and non-substance use related)? 2) Did drug-related suspensions decrease? 3) Were there any students with repeat infractions?
Objective D: By October of 2024 A2S completion rate will be 75%.	1) Was the goal for a successful completion rate reached?

Goal 2: Reduce youth marijuana and substance use.	
Objectives	**Evaluation Questions**
Objective A: By October 2021 provide a school-based substance use counseling program.	1) Did students find these counseling services easily accessible? 2) Were students aware of the services and support available to them? 3) Was a counselor available for students when needed?
Objective B: By October 2024 collect 150 youth pre- and post-surveys from participants in Alcohol and Other Drugs Safety Class.	1) Did student attitudes and perceptions of marijuana and other substances change? 2) Was there a change in the student perceptions of the potential health risks associated with substance use?

Objective C: By October, 2024 collect pre and post surveys from students participating in Alternative to Suspension Programs.	1) Were students aware of the consequences and/or support available if someone was caught using a substance at school? 2) Did external factors (e.g. sociocultural, environmental) influence student knowledge and awareness with respect to the PS program?
Objective D: By October, 2024 recidivism rates for substance using offenders will decrease by 25%.	1) Was there a decrease in self-reported substance use rates? 2) Were there any repeat offenders out of the students who completed the RAYS program? 3) Did student recidivism rates decrease?

Goal 3: Increase access to SUD treatment.	
Objectives	**Evaluation Questions**
Objective A: Provide school-based SUD treatment at all four sites. (Individual and group counseling)	1) Did students at all 4 target sites find these SUD treatment services readily available when needed? 2) Did students know how to access these services when appropriate?
Objective B: Promote services so students know how to access them.	1) Did student awareness of available support and services increase? 2) What student populations were being targeted for outreach & promotional efforts?
Objective C: Provide SUD treatment to students in the A2S program.	1) Did SUD treatment provide an appropriate avenue for referrals to external agencies when needed? 2) What role did the SUD treatment services play in the successful completion of the PS program?
Objective D: Refer students to more extensive outside SUD services as needed.	1) Was there an effective & efficient protocol for referring students to external agencies? 2) Were there any logistical obstacles when referring students for additional support?
Objective E: By October 2024 provide SUD treatment to 100 students at the four sites.	1) Was the estimated number of students who sought out SUD treatment reached? 2) Did most students who sought out SUD treatment exit the program successfully/were referred for additional support?

3.3 Activities

3.3.1 Participant-based activities

Criteria for determining participant success and activity completion was tracked via the case management database. This was done by linking a student's profile in the database to all activities that they participated in. This allowed for the assessment of participant success in relation to activity completion. All services and activities offered through the RAYS program were considered "participant-based" activities. Table 3 presents the total unduplicated number of RAYS enrollees who participated in each activity type. Overall, a total of 999 activities, including those involving the general student body and staff, were implemented during the evaluation period (see Table 8).

Table 3. Activity participation among RAYS enrollees (unduplicated)

Activity	Number of participants
RAYS circle	108
Harm reduction class	43
Counseling session (including SUD treatment)	128
DBT class	7
SEL class	11
Cessation support group	3

Participant success was determined using the following criteria:

- Participate in a restorative circle with a team of peers.
- Attend a harm reduction class, if included in their Restorative Plan.
- Attend at least three counseling sessions, if included in their Restorative Plan.
- Complete a community engagement project, if included in their Restorative Plan.
- Successfully complete all (or most) of the components in their Restorative Plan (at least 75% of all students who enroll in RAYS).

3.4 Outcome measures

Table 4. Outcome evaluation measures

Outcome measure	Definition	Data source	Frequency
Suspension rates	# total suspensions / # total student enrollment	School discipline data reports; CDE DataQuest repository	Annually
Substance use rates among general student body	Past 30-day marijuana or other substance use	Mapping Youth Health Behavior (MYHB) Survey	Annually
RAYS student substance use rates	Past 30-day marijuana or other substance use	Pre/post surveys	Program enrollment & exit

Perceptions of substance use among general student body	Harm perceptions (some day vs. everyday use)	MYHB Survey	Annually
Perceptions of substance use among RAYS students	Harm perceptions (some day vs. everyday use)	Pre/post surveys	Program enrollment & exit
Awareness of SUD services among RAYS students	% of students aware of services and support	Pre/post surveys	Program enrollment & exit
RAYS enrollment rate	# students enrolled in RAYS / # students referred for disciplinary action	Enrollment/Exit forms School discipline records	Annually
RAYS completions	# students who successfully completed the RAYS program / # total enrollments	Enrollment/Exit forms	Annually
Recidivism rate	# RAYS students who successfully completed RAYS who were involved in a subsequent disciplinary incident / # successful RAYS completions	Enrollment/Exit forms School discipline records	Annually

3.5 Quantitative and qualitative data analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses of survey data (i.e., pre/post, MYHB) were conducted to calculate frequencies for substance use behaviors, attitudes, perceptions, awareness of school programs/policies, and awareness of support and services at individual enrollee and school-wide levels. Simple frequencies and counts were tabulated for pre/post survey findings. For school-wide MYHB survey results, weighted frequencies and 95% confidence intervals were calculated for data points of interest. SAS® software version 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary NC) was used to conduct these analyses.

Discipline data collected from school records and the CDE's DataQuest data repository were used to inform changes in suspension rates over time. CDE data was exported, tabulated, and filtered to only include unduplicated counts of students suspended from the 2018-2019 to 2023-2024 academic year. Suspension rates were calculated as the proportion of students suspended over the total number of students enrolled at a school site. Individual discipline data records provided by the school sites were used to inform the calculation of the recidivism rate (see Table 4 above). All analyses for discipline data were conducted in Microsoft Excel®.

Tabulation of activity (i.e., via the GAL) and case management data (e.g., individual activity participation, program enrollments, program exits) were employed to answer evaluation

questions on program participation and successful completion. Total counts for each activity type and number of participants per activity were summed. These provided duplicated counts of participants for each activity. For some activities, enrollee identifiers were linked, allowing for the calculation of individual-level participation among enrollees (e.g., counseling sessions, harm reduction classes).

Interview and focus group recordings were transcribed. A qualitative thematic analysis of these transcriptions was then conducted using MAXQDA© (2025, VERBI Software). High-level themes were identified via a two-step coding process. Thematic topic areas included perceptions of the RAYS program (i.e., goals, purpose, structure), program impacts across multiple levels (i.e., enrollees, school community), challenges/obstacles encountered, and ways in which the program could be improved.

3.6 Comparative analysis

Strategies for determining if outcomes were related to the RAYS program or the result of an external influence included tracking activity implementation and assessing individual student behaviors against intended outcomes associated with the program. All program-level components were tracked to ensure activities were implemented in keeping with intended outcomes. A pre- and post- analysis of data from student surveys was employed to determine the impact, if any, of the RAYS program components on student behaviors over time. The same was done using data from RAYS questionnaires to assess any potential individual-level impacts of the program's components on participants. School discipline data was also collected to monitor changes in suspension counts and rates at the four participating school sites before and during implementation of the RAYS program.

Where possible, other activities were identified as similar and potentially relevant in effect (though not funded by the RAYS project) were tracked to monitor any external influences they may have on RAYS-sponsored activities and student behavior. Unfortunately, there was no comparison group within Nevada County to serve as a control for assessing program impacts. Given Nevada County's small size and the fact that the RAYS program served a majority of comprehensive and continuation school students, a group of comparable schools did not exist within the county. Four comparable school sites outside of Nevada County were selected to compare suspension rates over time. Comparability was determined by student enrollment, racial/ethnic breakdown, historical suspension rates, and regional proximity. Four sites were identified to have similar characteristics to the Nevada County schools participating in RAYS. RAYS program coordinators were asked to confirm and approve these sites as appropriate comparison groups.

4. Evaluation Results

4.1 Process evaluation findings and adaptations

Throughout the implementation period, RAYS coordinators and UCSD staff met monthly to discuss process evaluation items including activity implementation, survey results, and strategies for improving data collection efforts. The following adaptations were made to the program as a result of process evaluation findings:

- **Activities:** Qualitative feedback from RAYS enrollees collected via the pre/post surveys was used to inform adaptations to specific components of the program. For instance, program coordinators used feedback collected via surveys to adapt training sessions for their peer advocates and curriculum covered in the harm reduction classes.
- **Tracking system:** Adaptations were made to the activity tracking system and case management logs drawing from feedback given by RAYS program staff. For example, categories for activity types (e.g., counseling, circles, training sessions) and completion statuses (e.g., successful, lost to contact, other) were iteratively revised to meet the adapting array of services offered and appropriate tracking of program exits.
- **Data collection**: Feedback from students on the pre/post surveys was used to inform changes to the survey language and administration format. To adjust for varying comprehension levels, the RAYS team moved to a form of interview-administered surveying.[13] This resulted in improved response rates for the pre/post surveys.

4.2 Participant demographics

Table 5 presents demographics of all students who enrolled in the RAYS program from May 2021 through October 2024 (N=145). Most enrollees identified as White, male, were between the ages of 13-17, and currently enrolled in a high school. For race/ethnicity, students were allowed to select more than one option. Students who selected multiple races/ethnicities were categorized as ‘Multiple’.

Table 5. Demographic breakdown of all RAYS enrollees

	N=145 Percent (N)
Race/ethnicity	
White	59.3 (86)
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	8.3 (12)
Black of African American	2.1 (3)
Asian	0.7 (1)
Native American or Alaskan Native	2.8 (4)
Multiple	24.8 (36)
Other/Missing	2.1 (3)
Age	
12 years or younger	11.0 (16)
13-17 years	85.5 (124)
18-20 years	2.8 (4)
Other/missing	0.7 (1)
Gender identity	
Male	51.0 (74)
Female	46.9 (68)
Other/missing	2.1 (3)
School enrollment	
High school	77.9 (113)
Middle school/junior high	22.1 (32)

Table 6 presents data on reasons for referral to the RAYS program for all enrollments. Most students were diverted to RAYS from drug-related disciplinary incidents. The number of times students were enrolled in RAYS is also reported in Table 6. As shown, 5.8% of students enrolled in RAYS more than once. Table 7 reports the types of substances and products these students were caught with. Most students who were diverted from drug-related incidents were caught in possession of or using a vape device.

Table 6. Reasons for referral to the RAYS program

Referral reason	**N=154** **Percent (N)**
Drug-related	70.8 (109)
Harassment/bullying	5.8 (9)
Defiance	3.2 (5)
Truancy/attendance issues	5.8 (9)
Violence/fighting	2.6 (4)
Vandalism	2.6 (4)
Other	8.4 (13)
Not reported	0.6 (1)
Number of times enrolled in RAYS	
1	94.2 (145)
2+	5.8 (9)

NOTE: data presented here are duplicated as some students enrolled in RAYS more than once and for different reasons

Table 7. Types of substances reported for drug-related disciplinary incidents

Substance	**N=109** **Percent (N)**
Marijuana (any)	29.4 (32)
Vape device (nicotine or unknown)	53.2 (58)
Alcohol	4.6 (5)
Other	1.8 (2)
Unknown	13.8 (15)

NOTE: data presented here may be duplicated as some students were caught with multiple substances

4.3 Activities

Table 8 presents the total number of activities and number of participants per activity. The number of participants includes duplicates as some students may have attended an activity more than once. Overall, a total of 999 activities were implemented from May 2021 through October 2024. "Other" activities include brief student check-ins, meetings with school administrators and teachers, or other meetings with other partner organizations.

Table 8. Counts of activities by type (N=999)

Activity	Number of activities	Number of Participants*
RAYS circle	148	1172
Harm reduction class	18	100
Counseling session(s)	467	489
Dialectical behavior therapy class	6	37
Social emotional learning class	18	73
Cessation support group	4	8
RAYS plan support	28	185
Peer advocate trainings	86	1350
Peer advocate meetings	27	322
Staff trainings	13	199
Staff meetings	88	339
NCSOS partnership meetings	5	34
UCSD-NCSOS evaluation meetings	17	49
RAYS informational presentation	47	4274
Other	27	245
TOTAL	**999**	**8876**

*Number of participants may include duplicates

4.4 Progress toward goals

All goals outlined in the work plan were met. This included a reduction in overall suspension rates across all four sites, a reduction in substance use rates (including marijuana) among RAYS enrollees and the general student population, and increased access to SUD treatment services through RAYS. Most of the program objectives were met except for the following:

- **Goal 1, Objective C: Drug-related suspension rates will have decreased by 20% by October 2024**
    - The total number of drug-related suspensions was 47 in 2021-22 and 72 in 2023-24. Data for disaggregated suspensions by type was not available for the 2018-19 academic year. Therefore, only count comparisons between 2021-22 and 2023-24 were possible. Nonetheless, overall suspension rates decreased from 2018-19 to 2022-23 (11.8% to 7.4%, respectively).
- **Goal 2, Objective B: By October 2024 collect 150 youth pre- and post-surveys from participants in Alcohol and Other Drugs Safety Class.**

- Out of the 43 students who participated in a harm reduction class, 72.1% (n=31) completed both the pre- and post-surveys.

4.4.1 Challenges and obstacles

Several factors were considered to have affected progress towards meeting the intended goals and objectives. One factor was staff buy-in across the four sites participating in RAYS. Since RAYS was marketed as an alternative to suspension, referrals to the program were at the discretion of site administrators (e.g., principal, vice principal/assistant principal, disciplinary officer). As such, diversion to RAYS in lieu of punitive measures like suspension was considered "optional". Findings from structured interviews with staff members revealed that support and buy-in from staff was a significant barrier to expanding the program as an alternative to punitive disciplinary approaches. As a result, RAYS may not have been offered as an option for all potentially eligible students. Therefore, students involved in drug-related incidents may not have been offered RAYS services such as harm reduction classes and SUD treatment counseling. To address this, program coordinators aimed to promote the program among students by raising awareness during school-wide assemblies and presentations. This was done to encourage students to advocate for alternative disciplinary options.

Another challenge was attendance and student follow-through with the program. For instance, while most students successfully exited the program, 4.7% were lost to follow-up (i.e., could not contact), 1.4% were non-compliant, and for 2.7% the services offered through RAYS were found to not be appropriate. Additionally, since most of the students who enrolled in RAYS also had a history of truancy, there were challenges with getting students to complete their restorative plans. To address this, RAYS program coordinators hired a case manager to monitor student progress in the program. The case manager worked with students to ensure they were on track to complete the components outlined in their restorative plan to successfully exit RAYS.

4.4.2 Facilitators

One of the core components of the RAYS program was the peer-led approach to restorative justice. The youth advocates played a critical role in facilitating certain activities (i.e., RAYS Circles) and providing support for the enrollees. Being an advocate entailed attending training sessions that covered a range of topics from knowledge of restorative approaches to how to handle sensitive topics that come up during circles. Youth advocates who participated in a focus group described RAYS as an "alternative to punitive discipline" to "meet students where they are at", key tenets of restorative justice.[8] These same students also spoke to how the program influenced their views of their peers, increasing awareness of the unique challenges that some students face at school and at home. As such, youth advocates may have had an indirect effect on school community connectedness among those involved with RAYS and the general student population.

Program coordinators, case managers, and counselors also played an important role in ensuring implementation fidelity and service acquisition for enrollees. The coordinating team, which included the program director, restorative practices coordinator, case manager, and RAYS counselor, met on a weekly basis to discuss program updates, strategies for handling student cases, and improvements/adaptations. This coordination ensured that all aspects of the program were running as intended while making necessary changes to meet student needs.

4.5 Process evaluation results

The process evaluation aimed to monitor the program's progress in meeting the initial goals and objectives pertaining to case management and activity implementation. Core components of the process evaluation included tracking activity implementation and program enrollments across the evaluation period. Process-oriented evaluation questions are presented in section 3.2 – Evaluation Questions.

4.5.1 Activity Implementation

Overall, a total of 999 activities were implemented from May 2021 to October 2024. The number of activities increased across the evaluation period (see Figure 3). The number of activities by type are reported in section 4.2 - Activities. The first RAYS circle was conducted in November of 2021 with other circles beginning in April of 2022 (Goal 1, Objective B). Several peer advocate training sessions and meetings were held prior to the first circle that was held. Overall, student engagement levels in these sessions and meetings ranged from medium to high. Ongoing training sessions with staff and students were held throughout each academic year.

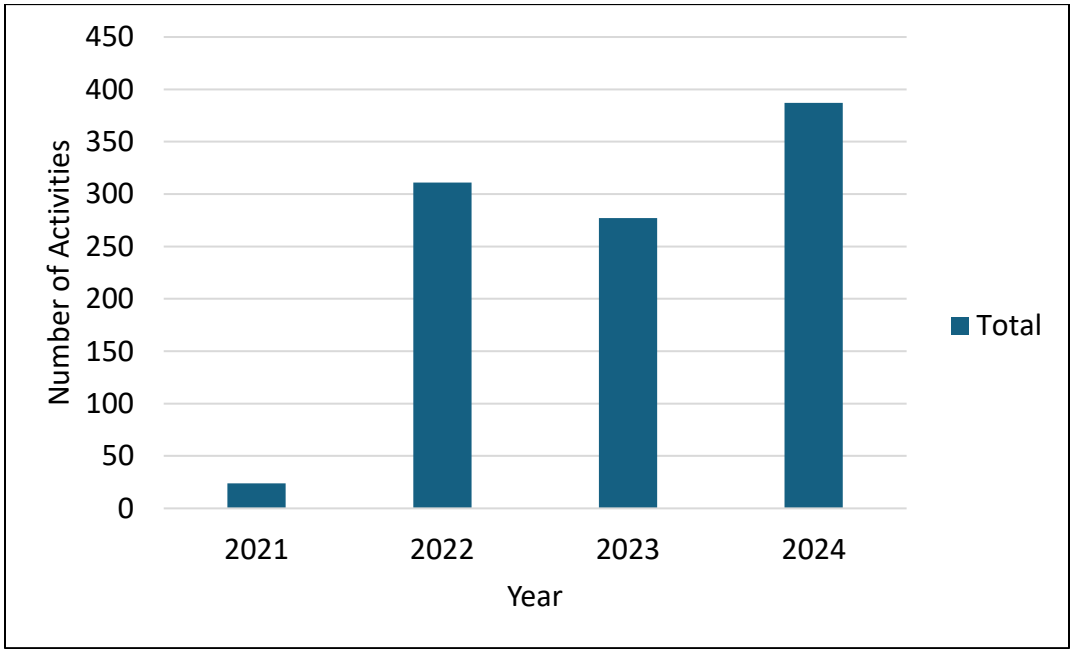


Figure 3. Count of RAYS activities from 2021 to 2024.

Across the course of the grant, feedback from students and youth advocates was used to inform improvements to the format and structure of the circles. However, these changes were school-dependent. For instance, a peer team at one school employed an approach where they took turns asking the enrollee questions during the circle, whereas at another school the peer team took a more staggered approach.

4.5.2 Referrals and Enrollments

Out of 725 students referred for disciplinary incidents from 2021 to 2024, 145 (20%) enrolled in RAYS (Goal 1, Objective A). However, it is important to note that not all students were offered RAYS as an option as disciplinary procedures are at the discretion of site administrators. Program coordinators met with administrators at each site to strategize ways to increase utilization of the RAYS program as an ATS option. Additionally, most RAYS program enrollments occurred during the Fall semester of each academic year. These periods were usually followed by minor upticks in enrollments in the Spring semester, upon returning from winter break.

4.6 Outcome evaluation results

The main aim of the outcome evaluation was to assess any changes in key outcome measures including suspension rates, recidivism rates, substance use behaviors, resource awareness, and program completion. Outcome-oriented evaluation questions are presented in section 3.2 – Evaluation Questions.

4.6.1 Suspension and Recidivism Rates

Overall, suspension rates declined across all four participating school sites compared to the years before RAYS was implemented (Goal 1, Objective C). During the 2018-19 school year, 363 students were suspended (11.8% suspension rate). In 2023-24, 214 students (7.4%) were suspended, representing a 37.2% reduction in suspension rates. Drug-related suspensions increased from 47 in 2021-22 to 72 in 2023-24. However, it is important to note that disaggregated data for suspensions by type were not available for the 2018-19 academic year. As such, it was not possible to calculate drug-related suspension rates during the years prior to the implementation of RAYS.

For comparison, 138 students at the four comparable sites were suspended in 2018-19 (4.9% suspension rate) and 189 (7.1% suspension rate) in 2023-24. Figure 4 presents the trends in suspension rates for RAYS schools and non-RAYS schools from 2018-19 to 2023-24. As shown, RAYS schools reported substantially higher rates during the 2018-19 academic year, remained lower from 2020 to 2023, and were similar to the comparable sites during 2023-24.

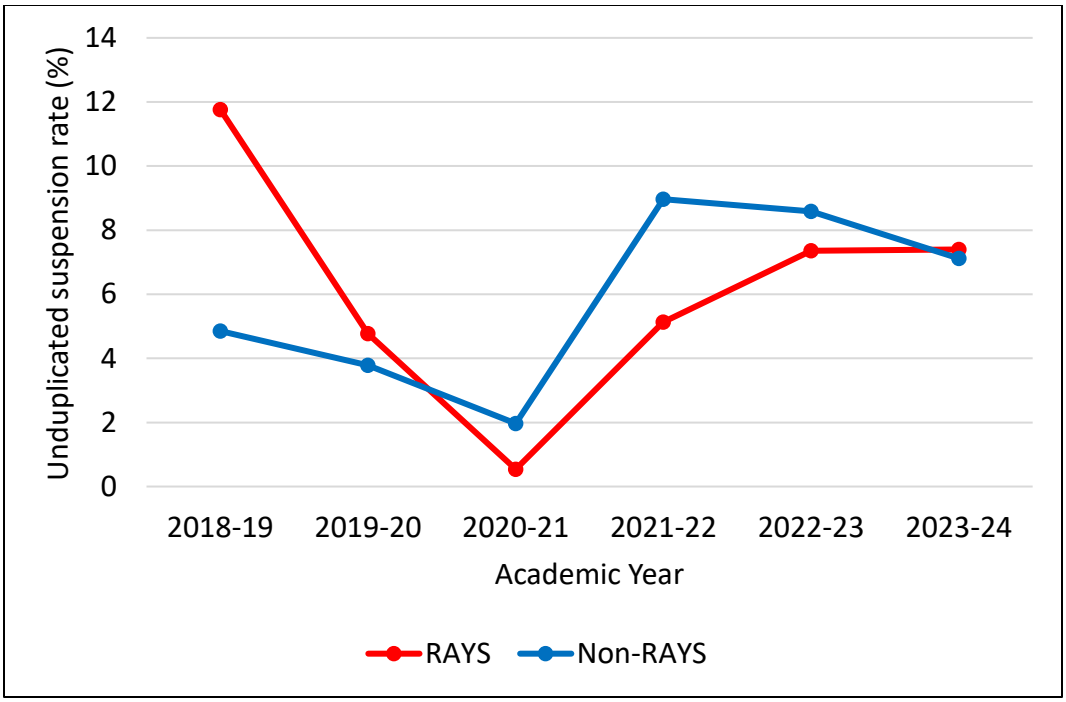


Figure 4. Suspension rates in RAYS and non-RAYS schools from 2018-2024

Among students who enrolled in RAYS and successfully exited the program, 19 were reported to have been involved in at least one subsequent disciplinary incident. This equates to a recidivism rate of approximately 15.0%. Among those who successfully exited the RAYS program, 7.1% (n=9) were involved in a repeat incident (Goal 2, Objective D). One goal of the RAYS program was to reduce recidivism rates by 25%. In 2023, of the 127 students who successfully exited RAYS, 10.2% were involved in a subsequent disciplinary incident. In 2024, 4.7% were involved in another incident. This represents a 53.9% reduction in recidivism rates from 2023 to 2024 (Goal 2, Objective D).

4.6.2 Substance Use Behaviors

Table 9 reports aggregate data on substance use behaviors collected via the MYHB survey for all four school sites from the 2021-22 to 2023-24 academic year. Overall, vape use decreased from 16.0% to 12.9%; however, this may be attributed to external factors such as increased regulatory and public health policies that sought to limit access and use of flavored vape products among adolescents in California.[14] Both marijuana and alcohol decreased; however, there were no statistically significant changes in use rates from 2021-22 to 2023-24. There were no significant changes in cigarette use during these years.

Table 9. Substance use rates from the 2021-22 to 2023-24 academic year

	2021-22 N=1,467 % (95% CI)	2022-23 N=1,486 % (95% CI)	2023-24 N=1,832 % (95% CI)
Cigarettes	4.1 (3.0, 5.1)	4.0 (2.7, 5.3)	4.5 (3.3, 5.6)
Vapes[a]	16.0 (14.0, 18.0)	14.7 (12.6, 16.8)	12.9 (11.1, 14.7)
Marijuana	21.0 (18.8, 23.3)	20.5 (18.2, 22.8)	18.3 (16.2, 20.3)
Alcohol	23.4 (21.1, 25.7)	21.3 (19.0, 23.6)	20.9 (18.8, 22.9)

95% CI = 95% confidence interval

[a]Vapes with nicotine or just flavoring

Table 10 presents the proportion of RAYS enrollees who reported a decrease in use from pre- to post-survey (Goal 2, Objective D). These proportions represent those students who reported "yes" to having used a substance in the last 30 days at pre-survey, and "no" at post-survey. Overall, approximately one quarter (35.6%) of RAYS students who reported any substance use before the program reported a decrease in use from pre- to post-survey.

Table 10. Past 30-day substance use rates among RAYS enrollees from pre- to post-survey.

	Decrease in use rates N (%)
Any substance use (n=73)	26 (35.6%)
Vapes[a] (n=56)	16 (28.57%)
Marijuana (n=55)	10 (18.18%)
Alcohol (n=25)	8 (32.0%)
Pills to get "high" (n=0)	0

[a]Vapes with nicotine or just flavoring

RAYS enrollees were also asked questions about harm perceptions in the pre/post surveys (Goal 2, Objective D). Table 11 reports the percentage of enrollees who reported an increase in harm perceptions from pre- to post-survey. This was assessed by asking students to indicate how harmful they believed it was to use any of the substances some days (1=Not at all harmful to 5=Extremely harmful). Overall, there were minor increases in perceived harm for vapes, alcohol, and pills to get "high". NOTE: a high proportion of enrollees reported high levels of harm perceptions for vapes (73.27%), alcohol (86.14%), and pills to get "high" (94.12%) in the pre-survey.

Table 11. Increase in harm perceptions among RAYS enrollees

	Increase in harm perceptions N=101
Vapes[a]	7.92%
Marijuana	18.81%
Alcohol	6.93%
Pills to get "high"	2.35%

[a]Vapes with nicotine or just flavoring

4.6.3 Resource Awareness and Accessibility

Another measure of interest was a change in awareness of RAYS resources (Goal 2, Objective A). Among RAYS enrollees, this was assessed by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: "I can name at least one place or person at my school that I can go to for help with substance use problems (Ex. Marijuana, vapes, cigarettes, alcohol)." (1=Strongly agree to 4=Strongly disagree). Responses were dichotomized to create two levels – 1=agree and 2=disagree. Most enrollees (87.9%) said they were aware of these resources. Overall, 11.9% of students reported an increase in awareness of substance use resources at their school from pre- to post-survey (Goal 3, Objective B). Additionally, a majority (96.04%) of RAYS enrollees said that the resources (counseling) provided through the program were available when needed (Goal 3, Objective A).

A question in the MYHB survey also assessed awareness of programs for students caught using substances at school. Among these respondents, 12.9% reported that a student who is caught using or in possession of a marijuana would be referred to a "substance use program" or "attend a class or program" while 12.7% of students reported the same for incidents involving vapes (Goal 1, Objective A).

Another goal was to provide SUD treatment services to 100 students (Goal 3, Objective E). A total 94 students out of the 145 who enrolled in RAYS were referred for SUD treatment with the RAYS counselor. Of note, the RAYS program did not have a counselor for a few months during the 2022-23 academic year. Therefore, DBT classes were offered in lieu of formal counseling sessions until one was hired. Enrollees met with the counselor for at least 3 sessions (Goal 3, Objective C). The RAYS counselor worked with program coordinators to establish a protocol for determining if a student needed to be referred to an external organization for additional support services (Goal 3, Objective D). A total of 13 students were referred for additional services based on these protocols. Additionally, some students continued to meet with the RAYS counselor upon exiting the program (N=13).

4.6.4 Program Completion

One of the original program goals was to reach a program completion rate of 75% (Goal 1, Objective C). Of the 145 students who enrolled in RAYS, 85.8% successfully completed the program. Among the students who received SUD treatment services through RAYS, 83% successfully completed/exited the program and 13.83% were referred for additional support (Goal 3, Objective E).

5. Discussion

All three of the RAYS program goals were met. There was a reduction in overall suspension rates, a decrease in substance use (including marijuana) among RAYS enrollees, and an increase in the acquisition of substance use treatment services. Additionally, recidivism rates decreased from pre- to post-implementation of the RAYS program (46.0% vs. 13.1%, respectively). Having the RAYS program as an ATS option had an impact on referrals for suspensions at the four target sites. This was evident by the reduction in suspension rates.

The core components of the RAYS program seem to be associated with these behavioral and environmental changes. For instance, increased utilization of the RAYS program in lieu of suspension may be the result of increased awareness among staff and students through promotional events or word-of-mouth. Staff may be offering RAYS as an ATS for students at higher rates and students may be opting for RAYS when provided with the option. Additionally, decreases in recidivism may be an indicator that the program is providing students with the necessary skills and support to avoid future incidents. For instance, participation in activities that require enrollees to reflect on mistakes and potential harm done may influence behavioral factors (e.g., self-responsibility, social-emotional regulation) associated with engagement in subsequent incidents.

Decreases in substance use behaviors may be related to exposure to harm reduction classes and SUD treatment services. The aim of the harm reduction classes was to increase awareness of the harms of substance use and encourage “safer” and “healthier” alternatives. While the curriculum of these classes did not promote complete abstinence, students may have gained knowledge and tools to reduce their use, which is evident by the individual impacts on substance use behaviors among RAYS enrollees. Participation in counseling sessions and diversion to additional SUD treatment resources may have also played a role in decreased use among enrollees. Access to support services, both within and outside of school settings, has been associated with a decrease in risky substance use behaviors among adolescents.[15]

This evaluation is not without limitations. The absence of a comparable control group limits the ability to provide a conclusion on the effectiveness of the RAYS program. However, since the original goals and objectives were to evaluate impacts at school and individual levels, a control group was not warranted. Regardless, publicly available suspension data from comparable sites in a neighboring county were used to inform the comparison of suspension rates over time. This comparison showed that at schools where the RAYS program was implemented, suspension rates decreased drastically, indicating a positive effect on the overall discipline landscape at these sites. Nonetheless, future evaluations of RAYS may consider including a control group to assess the counterfactual.

To conclude, enrollment in the RAYS program was associated with a decrease in substance use behaviors, moderate increases in harm perceptions, and a decrease in repeat offenses and suspension referrals. Beyond individual-level impacts, the presence of a restorative justice alternative to suspension program may have an influence on discipline protocols and philosophies at the organization level. The RAYS program offers a multifaceted approach to address disciplinary incidents, diverting students from punitive discipline to a program that promotes youth-led advocacy, community engagement, and connection to support services.

Recommendations for implementing and adapting the RAYS program

It is recommended that the following factors be considered should an agency wish to implement or adapt RAYS…

- **Staff buy-in:** establishing staff buy-in among school leadership (i.e., school administrators, superintendents) is critical to ensure the program is sustained over time and integrated as an alternative to suspension option across school sites.
    - Consider collaborating with school leadership to establish a protocol for referring students to RAYS which considers eligibility based on student records and nature of the incident.
- **Peer-led component:** ongoing recruitment and training of youth advocates is critical for the success of the program.
    - Conduct annual recruitment via promotional events (e.g., assemblies, presentations) or referrals from school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators).
    - Leverage the existing pool of former participants by recruiting them to join the RAYS program as youth advocates.
    - Multiple training sessions with youth advocates should encompass review of the core tenets of restorative justice and practice mock sessions for each peer-led activity (i.e., harm reparation/structured conversations, peer circles).
- **Integrating student feedback:** student feedback from focus groups, school-wide surveys, and pre/post surveys are critical to inform program adaptations.
    - Use feedback from multiple data sources to adapt components of the program and to meet the unique needs of a student population.
- **Taking a harm reduction approach:** employing an abstinence-only approach for substance use may not always be appropriate. Content covered during counseling sessions and harm reduction classes, such as social-emotional learning and harm reduction strategies, may equip them with necessary skills and tools to facilitate these behavioral changes.
    - Understanding that curriculum packages may not be “one-size-fits-all” is also critical. Therefore, considering the unique needs of a student population and adapting existing curricula is necessary.

Current Logic Model

Goal 1: Reduce suspension rates at the four schools selected for this proposal.				
Goal 2: Reduce youth marijuana and substance use.				
Goal 3: Increase access to substance use and drug (SUD) treatment.				
Inputs	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	**Impacts**
• Funding – Prop 64 BSCC grant • Program coordinators (e.g., Restorative Practices Coordinator) • RAYS counselor • Case manager • Youth advocate team • Harm reduction curriculum (i.e., Safety First) • Staff champions • Site liaisons • Partnerships/external support for program development • Partnerships/external support for student referrals	• RAYS circles • Creation of restorative plan(s) for each student • Harm reduction classes • Substance use and drug (SUD) counseling sessions • Community engagement activities • Referrals to external agencies (as needed) *Evaluation* • Pre/post survey administration • Mapping Youth Health Behavior (MYHB) survey administration • Staff and student interviews/focus groups • Develop and maintain case management and activity log tracking tool	• 154 RAYS enrollments • 148 RAYS circles • 18 Harm reduction classes • 467 counseling sessions were conducted • 125 completed community engagement activities • 13 referrals to external agencies (as needed) *Evaluation* • 101 pre/post survey responses • 999 total RAYS activities completed	*Short-Term* • 35.6% of RAYS enrollees who reported any substance use before RAYS reported a reduction in use • 94 students received SUD counseling *Medium-Term* • Suspension rates decreased by 37.3% from 2018-19 to 2023-24 • Marijuana use rates decreased from 21.0% in 2021-22 to 18.3% in 2023-24 • 7.1% of RAYS enrollees who were diverted from drug-related incidents recommitted a drug-related offense • 11.9% of enrollees reported increased awareness of support services offered through RAYS	• Shift to more restorative disciplinary practices/procedures • Change in student perceptions and attitudes towards marijuana and other substance use • Increased accountability and agency among students

Grantee Highlights

Success Story:

One student who went through RAYS last fall dreams of playing college football. He grew-up in foster care and is now in a loving home, but has been through a lot. Football is his passion and where he sees his future. On the first day of school, he was caught vaping. He was immediately kicked off the football team as he had been in trouble before and this was the final straw. As you can imagine, he was devastated. He is a junior and this was the year college recruiters were coming out to watch him play. He opted to go through RAYS. As part of his plan, he had a structured conversation with his football coach. He listened to the impact his choice had on the coach and the team and then had the opportunity to share his experience and what he'd thought about since that day and how he hoped he could make things right. As a result of this part of his plan, the coach allowed him to come back on the team upon the completion of his 30-day plan and he was able to play and continue on the path to fulfilling his dream. We checked in with him a few weeks back, and he said he has never vaped at school again and never would because of his experience with RAYS. Not all circles are as impactful as this one, but many of them are. There aren't many programs that allow students to repair harm caused by their choices and allow them to be accountable, all while being supported by their peers.

Highlights:

Student Team Members Presenting about RAYS to the student body.

Student Team Training: All 4 school sites

RAYS Plan in Action:

RAYS Circle

Structured Conversation

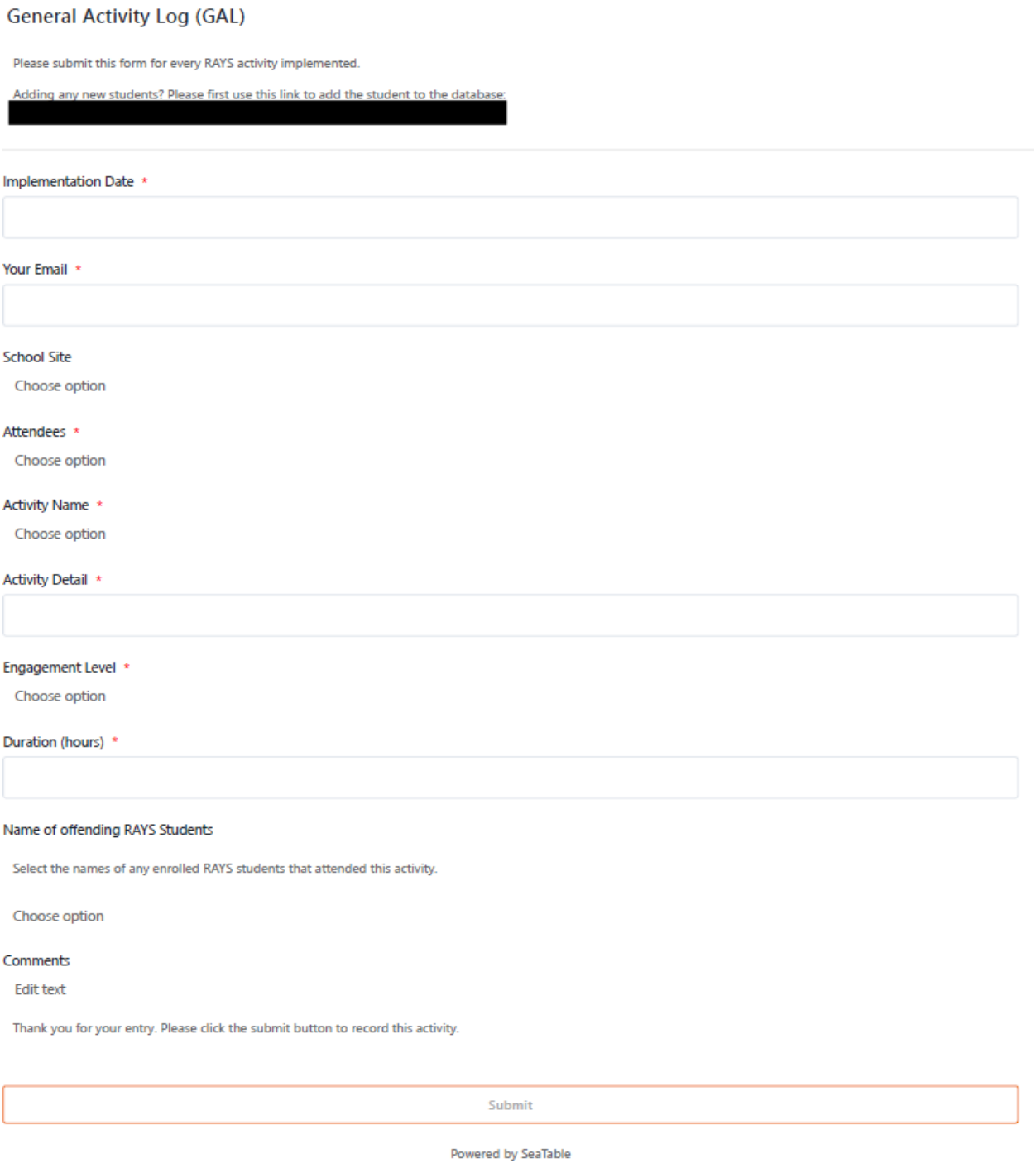
Community Engagement Project

Student-led tutoring

Future Circles	**Repairing Harm**
Every student going through RAYS will come back and sit with the student team to support another student going through the RAYS program.	Every student will make a plan to repair harm done to others by their choice/actions. This is usually done with a structured conversation.
Community Engagement	**Support Services**
Every student will complete a community engagement project that gives back to the school community. The team will choose several options aligned with the student's interests.	**Every student will:** • Receive counseling with our RAYS counselor. **Every student may:** • Receive education and support for reducing their substance use. • Receive academic support or tutoring.

Appendices

Appendix A. Activity Tracking Tool



General Activity Log (GAL)

Please submit this form for every RAYS activity implemented.

Adding any new students? Please first use this link to add the student to the database: [redacted]

Implementation Date *

Your Email *

School Site

Choose option

Attendees *

Choose option

Activity Name *

Choose option

Activity Detail *

Engagement Level *

Choose option

Duration (hours) *

Name of offending RAYS Students

Select the names of any enrolled RAYS students that attended this activity.

Choose option

Comments

Edit text

Thank you for your entry. Please click the submit button to record this activity.

Submit

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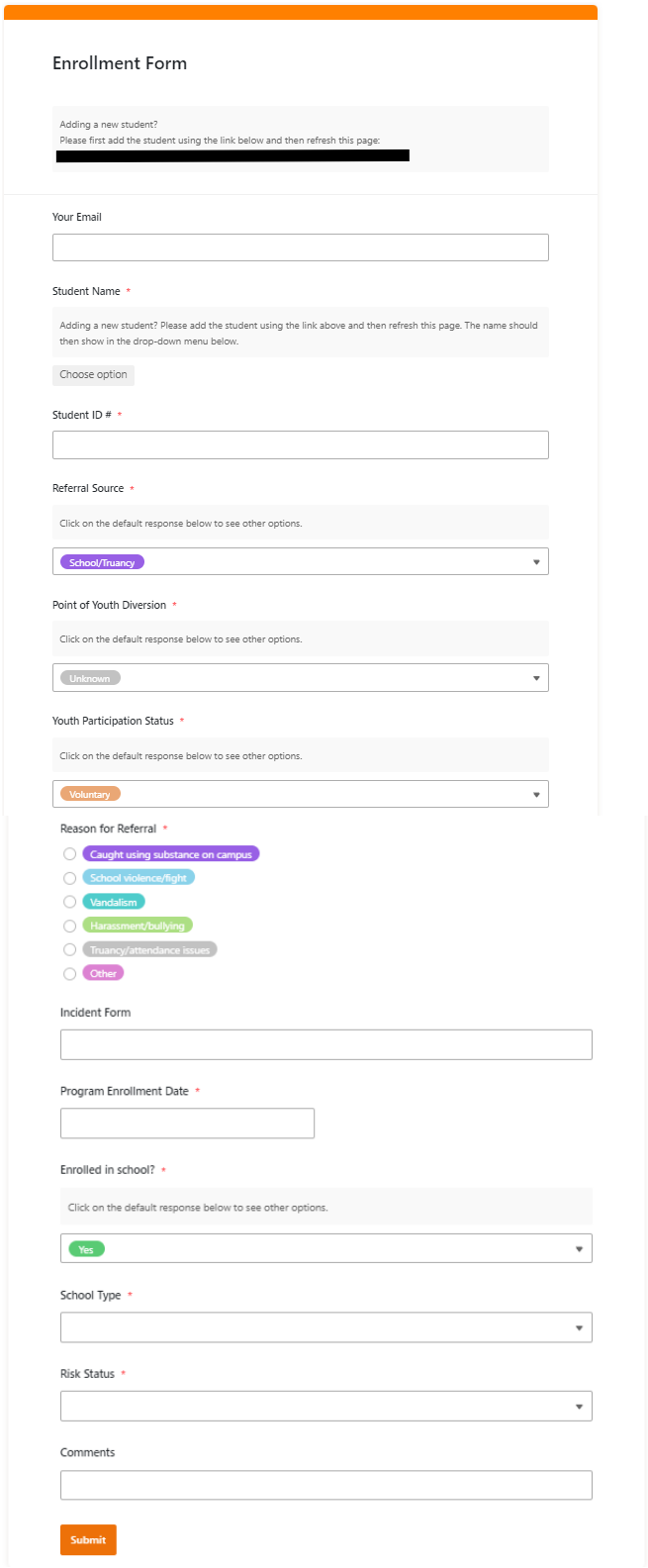
Appendix B. RAYS Enrollment Form



Enrollment Form

Adding a new student?
Please first add the student using the link below and then refresh this page:
[redacted]

Your Email

Student Name *

Adding a new student? Please add the student using the link above and then refresh this page. The name should then show in the drop-down menu below.

Choose option

Student ID # *

Referral Source *

Click on the default response below to see other options.

School/Truancy

Point of Youth Diversion *

Click on the default response below to see other options.

Unknown

Youth Participation Status *

Click on the default response below to see other options.

Voluntary

Reason for Referral *

- Caught using substance on campus
- School violence/fight
- Vandalism
- Harassment/bullying
- Truancy/attendance issues
- Other

Incident Form

Program Enrollment Date *

Enrolled in school? *

Click on the default response below to see other options.

Yes

School Type *

Risk Status *

Comments

Submit

Appendix C. RAYS Exit Form

Exit Form

Your Email *

Student Name *

Choose option

Restorative Plan *

Select the components that were in the student's original Restorative Plan.

- Future Circles
- Harm Reparation
- Community Engagement
- Support Services
- Harm Reduction Class
- DBT Class and counseling
- YVAPE
- SEL Class

Completed ALL components.

Did the student complete all components?

Did NOT complete all components

Did the student NOT complete all components?

Date Exited *

Exit Reason *

- Successful Completion
- Successful Completion - Joined RAYS
- Left School (lost contact)
- Non-Compliant (asked to leave)
- Arrest/Incarceration
- Services not appropriate for youth
- Other

Comments

Edit text

Please click the submit button below to record this entry.

Submit

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