

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/a-generation-later-what-weve-learned-about-zero-tolerance-in-schools>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Zero tolerance school discipline policies mandating suspension or expulsion of students for misconduct have gained tremendous momentum in middle and high schools since they were introduced in the late 1980s. This report looks at existing research to answer three questions:

The evidence concludes that neither adults nor young people have benefited from zero tolerance policies. In fact there is growing consensus that positive reinforcement is more effective, and behavioral problems should be resolved on a case-by-case basis.

Zero tolerance policies are beneficial for neither teachers nor students. We need alternatives that keep kids safely in school.

No studies have proven that an increase in student suspensions has led to a decrease in classroom disruption.

Zero tolerance policies were initially designed to respond to possession of a weapon. However, in recent years, only five percent of suspensions or expulsions nationally were for this offense.

Policies that require teachers or administrators to push students out of school can have life-long negative effects that severely limit a young person's future potential.

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