PURPOSE

To encourage the limited use of suspension, expulsion, and other punishments that remove students from instruction and offer recommendations for alternative methods to address school discipline.

ISSUE

Time out of school has huge implications for student achievement and future success. "Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school, from 16% for those not suspended to 32% for those suspended just once" (Losen & Martinez, 2013, p. 1). Certain discipline measures also funnel youth into the juvenile justice system and increase their risk for future incarceration. While schools have reported an overall decrease in the number of suspensions and expulsions since the 2011–12 school year, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights indicates that huge disparities remain in school discipline among the nation's middle level and high schools. Although they represent only 8% of the student population, Black male students accounted for 25% of students who received an out-of-school suspension. Black female students also represented 8% of the student population and accounted for 14% of students who received out-of-school suspensions. In addition, students with disabilities represented 12% of

students enrolled and 26% of students who received an out-of-school suspension. Research demonstrates that many suspensions are the result of minor infractions of school rules, such as violating dress codes, truancy, excessive tardiness, cell phone use, loitering, or classroom disruption (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2013).

Nonetheless, many schools and districts have reduced or eliminated suspensions, which suggests "factors controlled closely by the schools influence the high rates and observed disparities in suspensions" (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 36). Large districts such as Baltimore and Los Angeles have fostered effective school leadership and positive changes at the school level and reduced suspension rates as a result. Some of these district-level factors include "whether or not schools' discipline disparities are remedied, conducting careful selection and training of principals, providing support for teacher and leadership training, initiating changes to the school discipline code of conduct, and providing the specific behavioral supports and services that students with disabilities need" (Losen, et al, 2015). More than 30 states have also passed laws limiting the use of suspension or expulsion or had laws that encourage alternatives to disciplinary exclusion. One approach gaining popularity in schools is restorative justice, which can encompass dialogue techniques between teachers and students or more formal restorative conferencing that involves students, staff, and often family members. While the research base is still in its infancy, preliminary evidence shows a positive impact on school climate, expanded student engagement in learning, improved student achievement and graduation rates, and increased student chances for lifelong success. However, principals and assistant principals cannot make changes in school discipline policy on their own and will need significant assistance and resources from states and districts to enact these recommendations.

→ GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The principal's primary responsibility is to foster a safe, orderly, warm, and inviting environment where each student comes to school ready and eager to learn.

At its core, equity is a commitment to social justice, civil rights, and human connectedness. Building Ranks™: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective School Leaders describes equity as the behaviors, systems, processes, resources, and environments that ensure each member of the school community is provided fair, just, and individualized learning and growth opportunities; and that school leaders guarantee that each person is known, valued, treated justly, and receives the individualized high-quality education that is necessary to succeed in a global society.

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders state that effective leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Any strategy to reduce suspensions and expulsions must be part of a comprehensive schoolwide effort to improve the quality of classroom instruction accompanied by efforts to create conditions where students are meaningfully engaged in the school community and come to school ready to learn.

Schools have a responsibility to model and teach students methods of exerting authority and modifying behavior that are constructive, humane, and provide opportunities for growth. School discipline should be reasonable,

timely, fair, age-appropriate, and an appropriate response to a student's violation of the district code of conduct. NASSP has previously adopted position statements on [racial justice and educational equity](#), [school resource officers, culturally responsive schools](#), [trauma-informed schools](#), [educator diversity](#), [corporal punishment](#), [safe schools,](#) and [student profiling](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

- Develop guidance on nondiscriminatory administration of school discipline that includes technical assistance and best practices on enforcement, alternative strategies, and key resources to support states, districts, and schools in transitioning to more effective and equitable discipline and climate practices.

- Provide adequate funding for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, whose mission is to ensure equal access to education and promote educational excellence throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights.

- Require states that do not already do so to publicly report disaggregated data annually by school level and grade, race, ethnicity, income status, and gender that includes the number of students suspended, the number of incidents, the reasons for out-of-school suspensions, and the number of days out of school.

- Conduct research on effective alternatives to disciplinary exclusion, including strategies for reducing disciplinary disproportionality by race and gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, and disability.

- Provide funding to assist schools in recruiting and retaining school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to support school-based interventions and the coordination of services.

- Enact legislation to abolish corporal punishment in all states and to eliminate the use of seclusion and restraints.

- Authorize a competitive grant program to assist states and districts in implementing an early warning data system to identify struggling students and create a system of evidence-based and linguistically and culturally relevant interventions.

Recommendations for State Policymakers

- Collect and publicly report accurate discipline data in annual state and district report cards, including days of lost instruction due to out-of-school suspensions, referrals to law enforcement, and school-related arrests.

- Adopt legislation to encourage alternatives to suspension or expulsion, including restorative justice, community service, conflict resolution, counseling, peer mediation, and positive behavioral interventions and supports.

- Ensure that educator evaluation systems measure a principal's ability to develop and maintain a positive school culture that includes not only the tone of a school, but also school safety, enthusiasm of students and faculty, and the level of connectedness with the community.

Recommendations for District Leaders

■ Although officially rescinded by the Trump administration in 2018, continue to consult the joint guidance on nondiscriminatory administration of school discipline released in January 2014 by the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education.

■ Evaluate the district code of conduct and all schools' discipline data to ensure that out-of-school suspension and expulsion are not overused or disproportionately administered to certain student subgroups.

■ Engage principals, teachers, parents, and students in the development and scheduled periodic reviews of the code of conduct.

■ Ensure that suspension and expulsions are measures of last resort in the code of conduct and use them only if it is necessary to preserve the safety of other students and staff.

■ Include suspensions and expulsions as part of an early warning data system to target supportive interventions for at-risk students.

■ Implement multitiered systems of support that encompass prevention, wellness promotion, and interventions that are based on student need and promote close school-community collaboration.

■ Examine each school's distinct problems and any contributing factors before selecting which evidence-based interventions to use and how progress will be measured.

■ Focus on prevention and effective interventions as responses to disciplinary issues, including positive behavioral interventions and supports, social and emotional learning, peer juries, restorative justice processes, diversion, mentoring, mental health counseling, restitution, and community service programs.

■ Offer school leaders professional learning opportunities so they can understand, model, and offer feedback on restorative practices.

■ Provide adequate funding and training for school leaders and other educators on alternatives to out-of-school suspension such as afterschool tutoring and additional coaching from teachers, afterschool detention, Saturday school, parent conferences, in-school suspension, and alternative programs, which will ensure students spend more time in school, have increased adult attention and supervision, and have academic success.

■ Develop policies and an academic reentry plan to ensure that students who have been suspended are in the optimal classroom setting for success, have opportunities to make academic progress while excluded, and are offered a reasonable amount of time to make up homework, tests, quizzes, projects, or other required work that was missed.

■ Provide principals, teachers, school resource officers, and other staff with ongoing, job-embedded professional learning on child and adolescent development, implicit bias, culturally responsive classroom management, conflict resolution, and de-escalation approaches that decrease classroom disruptions and the need for disciplinary sanctions.

■ Develop due process procedures for appeal of schools' disciplinary actions and ensure that they are clearly communicated and applied equally to all students.

■ Establish clear guidelines for school personnel and school resource officers regarding the role of each in responding to disciplinary infractions, and ensure that police involvement is limited to situations when it is necessary to protect students and staff.

■ Ensure that school resource officers receive specialized training to help them become a part of the school community and contribute to a safe, orderly, and inviting school environment.

Recommendations for School Leaders

- Place a focus on preventing discipline and behavioral problems.

- Ensure that out-of-school suspension is used only if it is necessary to preserve the safety of other students and staff.

- Administer a culture survey of students, parents, and school personnel on a regular schedule that provides detailed feedback aligned with building culture and leading learning—factors that lead to a safe, caring, and high-performing culture.

- Create safe, supportive, and equitable learning environments that promote all students' social and emotional development.

- Review discipline data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability to identify concerns and monitor progress of school discipline reforms and their impact on conditions of learning.

- If disparities in discipline data are identified, commit the school to a plan of action to ameliorate the root cause of these disparities.

- Involve students and school personnel in establishing expectations for student and staff conduct and the consequences for noncompliance.

- Engage families and community partners in fostering the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional success of each student.

- Provide students and their families access to the discipline policies and student code of conduct in an easily understandable, age-appropriate format that makes clear the sanctions imposed for specific offenses.

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