

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**Position Statement on Reducing Disproportionality in  
Suspensions and Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline)**

**2019**

Adopted on February 6, 2019

The Connecticut State Board of Education (Board) believes that all students deserve an excellent education that helps them reach high standards of performance. As outlined in the Board's Five-year Comprehensive Plan, 2016-21: *Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students*, the promise of an excellent public education is to equip every child, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, family wealth, zip code, or disability status, with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college, careers and civic life. We know our students can succeed when they are offered challenging and rigorous programs of study that integrate the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to become productive members of society.

The Board believes that great schools are safe, welcoming and inclusive environments where students' academic, social, emotional, and physical health needs are met, and students are healthy, happy and ready to learn. Evidence-based behavioral interventions help meet students' needs while keeping them safe and in school. An effective approach to school discipline involves a proactive and comprehensive system of supports designed to provide opportunities for all students to achieve social, behavioral and learning success. Schools can meet this need by examining the factors that impact behavior as well as the relationship between environment and behavior. This includes constructive strategies to teach and support students and respond to behavioral concerns in a similar manner to academic concerns (i.e., increasing instruction and support when the issues occur). Exclusionary practices may sometimes be necessary for protecting students against imminent safety risks or when such action is required by state or federal law, but these practices should not be employed when other logical and proportionate consequences would better serve the social/emotional development of students. Exclusionary discipline practices limit students' access to classroom instruction and fail to improve student outcomes and school climate. These practices should be used as a last resort.

Exclusionary school discipline practices have a disproportionately adverse effect on students with disabilities, students of color and low-income students. Black and Hispanic students, and students with disabilities, are especially vulnerable to being excluded from school as a result of implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to attitudes, assumptions or stereotypes that affect one's understanding, actions, and decisions without conscious knowledge. A wealth of research demonstrates that the broad disciplinary category of school policy violations – which includes defiance, disrespect, and disruption – are more sensitive to cultural misinterpretation and unconscious bias. Students who have been expelled or suspended are as much as ten times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration. Reducing unnecessary suspensions and expulsions in Connecticut public schools is a critically important step to address achievement disparity and aligns with the Board's Five-year Comprehensive Plan, 2016-21: *Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students*.

The Board aims to ensure that schools are empowered to address challenging behaviors through a comprehensive systems approach (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, i.e., comprehensive and targeted supports), school-based diversion models and restorative practices. The term discipline is from the Latin word “*disciplina*” which means teaching and learning. Students learn best through relationships that make them feel safe and nurtured and support positive psycho-social behavioral outcomes. Schools can ensure a positive learning environment by engaging in a regular review and analysis of disaggregated discipline data, root cause analysis and professional development for all school personnel focused on classroom management, fair disciplinary policies, understanding implicit bias, cultural competencies and alternative discipline practices. These learning opportunities allow educators to address disciplinary matters as teachable moments while repairing the harm done through the issuance of restorative consequences. The Board encourages relevant school and district leaders and local boards of education to frequently and formally evaluate the effectiveness of school discipline policies and practices.

Districts and schools in Connecticut, directed by local board of education policy, can incorporate a range of strategies to promote a positive school climate, address misconduct and foster student safety in lieu of ineffective and potentially discriminatory exclusionary practices. These strategies promote the mutually-beneficial relationships between students, educators, families, school communities and develop welcoming, safe and inclusive schools. At the district level, improved coordination of services between schools and community agencies can create partnerships to meet students’ non-academic and behavioral needs. At the school level, schoolwide communication of expectations and coordination of behavioral supports can ensure consistency among classrooms and in common areas as well as improve overall school climate. In addition, by implementing an individualized and multi-tiered approach to organizing preventive strategies and interventions, schools can help students receive the supports they need to succeed. At the classroom level, teachers can build calm, safe, and restorative learning environments with positive, proactive and predictable classroom management strategies, which enable all students to thrive. At the district, school, and classroom levels, student, family, and community partnerships can promote empathy, foster collaboration and reap the strengths of our diverse and multicultural state.

# **Position Statement on Reducing Disproportionality in Suspensions and Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline)**

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## **Reducing Disproportionality in Suspensions & Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline) Guidelines for Policymakers**

The Connecticut State Board of Education, in support of its Position Statement on Reducing Disproportionality in Suspensions and Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline), offers the following guidelines to support collaboration among various stakeholders to build a comprehensive learning system that explicitly supports the reduction of disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions.

### **Responsibilities of the State Department of Education**

- Promote and advance a systemic approach to positive, preventive, and restorative school discipline philosophies and practices.
- Disseminate program guidance, exemplary policies, and resource lists, which illustrate evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline.
- Use school discipline data from districts to inform policy development, and statewide program planning for improvement.
- Make disaggregated school discipline data available and accessible to educators, families and community members. Provide training to educators, families and community members about how to access the data and use it to inform action.
- Establish procedures to assess the effectiveness of professional development approaches in improving school discipline practices and staff knowledge and skills.
- Provide leadership on statewide efforts to increase the diversity of educators to reflect the diversity of race, ethnicity, native language, socio-economic status, age, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation and physical abilities in the state.
- Investigate civil rights complaints when authorized by applicable laws and refer matters, as appropriate, to other state or federal authorities, including the CHRO, the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice.
- Provide technical assistance concerning the appropriate implementation of federal and state legislation and regulations pertaining to school discipline and nondiscrimination.

### **Responsibilities of Boards of Education and Superintendents of Schools**

- Commit to fostering relationships, so students, staff, and families feel connected to the district.
- Commit to increase the diversity of educators to reflect the diversity of race, ethnicity, native language, socio-economic status, age, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation and abilities in the state.
- Develop a shared districtwide vision to articulate the importance of a positive, preventive and restorative approach to school discipline, adopted by the board of education.
- Ensure that board of education disciplinary policies and practices employ a continuum of responses

that promote safe and supportive learning environments; clearly define incident types; provide consequences based on objective criteria, yet recognize mitigating circumstances and utilize school discipline approaches that keep students in class to maximize instructional learning time.

- Ensure that the board-adopted discipline policy limits the use of out-of-school suspensions pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-233c.
- Use program guidance, exemplary policies, and resource lists, which illustrate evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline.
- Create curriculum-embedded opportunities that teach social and emotional skills.
- Provide on-going professional learning opportunities for all staff regarding fair and equitable implementation of the disciplinary policy, including but not limited to classroom management skills, social-emotional learning, positive behavior supports, trauma-informed practices, cultural competence, and addressing unconscious bias.
- Partner with community providers and/or other professionals to deliver high-quality professional learning.
- Engage students and families in the process of developing and revising board of education school discipline policies and practices/codes of conduct.
- Engage, train and retrain, as appropriate, all staff in the development and deployment of tiered systems of support and other positive behavioral supports and interventions.
- Frequently review, analyze and evaluate timely disaggregated discipline data at the school level. Evaluate trends, such as whether specific groups of students are being disciplined disproportionately, if specific types of misconduct are disproportionately subject to discipline, or if specific personnel more frequently discipline subgroups of students. Use data to guide decisions about interventions.
- Collaborate, as directed by local board of education policy, with mobile crisis service providers, community-based mental health care agencies, and school-based health centers, to facilitate coordination and communication to promptly identify and refer students with mental, emotional or behavioral health issues to the appropriate treatment program, and plan for any appropriate follow-up with the child and family (Public Act 13-178). Assess the need for additional services under applicable state and federal laws.
- For districts that have police officers serving as school resource officers (SROs), develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a local law enforcement agency that defines the role and responsibility of SROs in accordance with C.G.S. Section 10-233m. The law requires that the MOU includes provisions outlining daily SROs' interactions with students and school personnel and may include additional language to address a graduated response model for student discipline.
- Engage in a process that aligns and maximizes federal, state, and local resources for
- evidence-based practices that reduce exclusionary discipline and improve student learning.

### **Responsibilities of School Leaders**

- Develop through collaboration with the school community, a shared schoolwide vision, articulated in board of education policies, for a safe, inclusive and positive school climate; define clear, specific and developmentally-appropriate expectations for student behavior; recognize and reinforce good behavior; incorporate instruction and other supports to promote future appropriate behavior; and provide clear, consistent and proportionate consequences for

misbehavior.

- Provide on-going professional learning opportunities for all staff regarding fair and equitable implementation of disciplinary policies including but not limited to classroom management skills, positive behavior supports, conflict resolution strategies, trauma-informed practices, cultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, and addressing implicit bias.
- Consider factors including positive behavioral interventions and supports, age, grade, developmental stage, the severity of the infraction (frequency, offenses, and intensity), disciplinary history, patterns, student intent, and culture and communication factors when determining a consequence for student behavior.
- Consider factors regarding students with disabilities to ensure compliance with applicable state and federal laws.
- Implement due process procedures pursuant to C.G.S. Sections 10-233c and 10-233d prior to excluding a student from school. If a student receives an exclusionary disciplinary sanction, implement a re-entry protocol to facilitate the transition back to the classroom.
- Implement the standards for *Alternative Educational Opportunities for Students Who Have Been Expelled* adopted by the State Board of Education in January 2018 in accordance with Public Act 17-220.
- Ensure there is a systems approach to enable students with social/emotional or behavioral needs access to the services offered by internal and/or external providers to be successful in school.
- Regularly review disaggregated discipline data to identify patterns that indicate the need for specific student interventions, additional staff supports or an investigation of biased practices.
- Use program guidance, exemplary policies, and resource lists, which illustrate evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline.
- Respond to students in emotional crisis by contacting Emergency Mobile Crisis Service providers and/or other appropriate emergency responders.
- Create a welcoming environment for the entire school community and support staff as they engage with families, students, and community members.
- Embed culturally responsive pedagogy into multiple aspects of the educational program to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Engage relevant stakeholders in allocating resources to foster and sustain educational equity for diverse student, family, and staff needs.

### **Responsibilities of Teachers (Including all School-Based Staff)**

- Establish a safe, inclusive and positive classroom environment that fosters student engagement, values student voice and emphasizes proactive and positive interventions.
- Establish and teach clear and consistent classroom expectations, use classroom management strategies that are individualized, personalized, and culturally-competent, and reinforce good behavior.
- Respond to challenging behaviors with instructionally-relevant support and consider own behavior and the presence of bias when reacting to students.
- Implement curriculum-embedded opportunities that teach social and emotional skills.
- Participate in opportunities to shape school and district discipline policies and practices.
- Participate in professional learning opportunities for all staff regarding fair and equitable implementation of disciplinary policies including but not limited to classroom management skills,

positive behavior supports, conflict resolution strategies, trauma-informed practices, cultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, and addressing implicit bias.

- Examine data on instruction and student outcomes and adjust practices as needed to promote the equitable implementation of instruction and supports.
- Proactively communicate with families about learning expectations and student academic or behavioral performance.
- Develop positive relationships with families to promote student success by focusing on student strengths and strategies for overcoming obstacles when communicating with both students and families.

### **Responsibilities of Higher Education Institutions and Teacher Preparation Programs**

- Prepare pre-service candidates to effectively create a positive learning environment in accordance with the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching, focusing on evidence-based and culturally-responsive approaches.
- Recruit and prepare students to serve as teachers in designated shortage areas as well as student support services personnel, with a focus on increasing the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the workforce.
- Engage in an on-going improvement process in the development and delivery of teacher preparation program curricula that addresses problems of practice in the field.

### **Responsibilities of Families and Community Members**

- Engage in two-way communication with school staff in order to co-create a well-rounded picture of the student, as well as shared expectations and understanding of the school discipline policy.
- Teach, model and positively reinforce social skills.
- Seek out and use community resources, in collaboration with school staff and community providers as appropriate, including positive youth development organizations or organizations which address social/emotional and behavioral needs of youth.
- Advocate for opportunities to support students and participate in the development and revision of school discipline policies and practices/codes of conduct.

### **Responsibilities of Students (as developmentally appropriate)**

- Become knowledgeable about the academic, social and behavioral expectations, ask questions for clarity, and seek assistance from a trusted adult when support is needed.
- Work to improve academic and social skills with the help of educators, family, and community.
- Treat peers, educators, family members and community members with respect and empathy.
- Acknowledge responsibility to follow school rules, accept responsibility for misbehavior, and engage with school staff to identify how a different choice might have resulted in a better outcome.
- Participate in efforts to build a positive school climate as well as alternatives to exclusionary discipline such as restorative circles or peer mentoring.

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