

# Report of The Maryland State Board of Education

## School Discipline and Academic Success: Related Parts of Maryland's Education Reform

July 2012



**Maryland State Board of Education**

**MR. JAMES H. DEGRAFFENREIDT, JR.**  
**President**

**MR. SAYED M. NAVED**

**DR. CHARLENE M. DUKES**  
**Vice President**

**MRS. MADHU SIDHU**

**DR. MARY K. FINAN**

**MR. GUFFRIE M. SMITH, JR.**

**MR. S. JAMES GATES, JR.**

**MS. DONNA HILL STATON, ESQ.**

**MS. LUISA MONTERO-DIAZ**

**DR. IVAN C.A. WALKS**

**MS. KATE WALSH**

**MS. NINA MARKS**

**DR. LILLIAN LOWERY**  
**Secretary-Treasurer of the Board**  
**State Superintendent of Schools**

**MARTIN O'MALLEY**  
**Governor**

The Maryland State Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation in matters affecting employment or in providing access to programs. For inquiries related to department policy, contact the Equity Assurance and Compliance Branch, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 W. Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201. 410.767.0433 (voice) 410.333.6442 (TTY/TDD). For more information about the contents of this document, contact 410.767.0307.

**© Maryland State Board of Education**  
**July 2012**

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	i
I. Why We Started to Study School Discipline.....	1
II. How We Conducted Our Study.....	1
A. Maryland Suspension/Expulsion Data.....	1
Conclusion We Drew From the Data.....	4
(1) Reduce the Number of Suspensions.....	4
(2) Ending Disproportionate/Discrepant Impact.....	6
B. Research and Reports.....	7
And Conclusions We Drew.....	10
C. Panels, Presentations, and Comments.....	13
And Conclusions We Drew.....	15
(1) Clarity of Explanation.....	15
(2) Minimum Education Services.....	15
(3) Changes to Regulations.....	17
III. Proposed Regulations .....	19
IV. Discipline Imposed Well and Appropriately Is One of The Tools Schools Can Use To Teach Students How to Succeed.....	25
Appendices	
(A) Commenters, Panelists and Presenters From The Education Community	
(B) Discipline Is Always Teaching	
(C) Lincoln High School Tries New Approach to School Discipline – Suspensions Drop 85%	

## Executive Summary

### I. Why We Are Engaging In School Discipline Reform

In February, 2012, after almost two years of study, this Board issued a draft report called "A Safe School, Successful Students and A Fair and Equitable Disciplinary Process Go Hand in Hand." In that draft report, we set the stage for the reform of school discipline in Maryland. That stage was built on public testimony, data, and research. Through a series of panels, presentations, and comments on the draft report, we learned about the disciplinary process, how fairly it was implemented and what problems were encountered. We learned from the hundreds of comments we received that we needed to be clear about why we are looking to reform school discipline in Maryland Public schools. The reason is this:

Maryland's goal is to create a world class education system that prepares all students for college and career success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Throughout all our education reform efforts and in all the discussions we have had about school discipline, we emphasized the imperative to address the needs of *all* students.

No student comes to school "perfect," academically or behaviorally. We do not throw away the imperfect or difficult students. Wise school discipline policies fit our education reform agenda because those policies show all students that they are included in the world class education goal. We want a world class education for them because the desired, sustainable result is a better economy and quality of life for everyone in Maryland.

In order for our students to get a world class education, they need to be in school. Thus, our school discipline philosophy focuses on keeping students in school. If suspension or expulsion is necessary, as a last resort, the school must keep suspended or expelled students connected to the school by providing education services that will allow the student to return to school with a chance to become college and career ready.

*Every student who stays in school and graduates, college and career ready, adds to the health and wealth of the State of Maryland and improves the global competitiveness of this country.*  
It is that simple. It is that important. It is all connected.

Thus, in this Report, we have connected school discipline to our education reform efforts, making school discipline and academic success equal partners in that effort. This is hardly a new connection, but we are now focused on how to make that connection happen in the public schools in Maryland.

## II. The Reforms We Are Instituting

We are making that connection by focusing on keeping students in school where they can learn. To do that, we are first adopting a rehabilitative approach to school discipline and proposing a regulation directing each school system to adopt a set of regulations that:

- (1) Reflect a rehabilitative discipline philosophy based on the goals of fostering, teaching and acknowledging positive behavior;
- (2) Are designed to keep students in school so that they may graduate college and career ready;
- (3) Prohibit disciplinary policies that trigger automatic discipline without the use of discretion;
- (4) Explain why and how long-term suspension or expulsions are last resort options.

We are also asking school systems to focus on the connection between school discipline and academic success when they are preparing the Great Teachers/Great Leaders section of their Master Plans.

Second, to help school systems adopt a rehabilitative approach and use best practices in school discipline, we have asked the State Superintendent of Schools to establish a School Discipline Best Practices Workgroup and to report to the Board on a regular basis on the work of the group. We ask that group to determine the types of professional development needed by teachers and administrators in implement best practices. We would like that group to consider training programs for school resources officers, also.

Third, to keep students in school, we are proposing a regulation that will reduce the number of long-term suspensions out-of-school for non-violent offenses. To assist in that effort, we are requesting the State Superintendent to re-convene the Student Code of Conduct Workgroup, add at least one State Board member to the group, and, among other things, direct the group to identify how school systems will code violent v. non-violent offenses.

Fourth, to keep students in school, we are determined to end the disproportionate impact of school discipline on minorities and the discrepant impact on special education students. To make that happen, we have directed MSDE to develop a way to analyze disproportionate impact. We expect that it will take resources to do this, particularly, statistical experts to develop and field test their models. We ask the State Superintendent of Schools to identify a funding source and to prepare a report for the Board explaining how this important work will be accomplished. In addition, we have proposed a regulation that requires any school system identified as having school discipline with a disproportionate impact on minorities to develop a corrective action plan to reduce the impact in one year, eliminate it in three, and report to the Board annually. Likewise, a school system with discrepant impact on special education students must do the same. In this way we can monitor progress in solving this problem.

Fifth, when out-of-school suspensions/expulsions are necessary, we are proposing a regulation requiring school systems to provide minimum education services to all student suspended/expelled students out of school. We expect that schools will maintain an educational

connection to each student during the term of the suspension or expulsion in order that the student can return to school on track to achieve.

Sixth, to bring students who are suspended back as quickly as possible, we have proposed amendments to the school discipline regulations, which among other things, focus on a timely disciplinary process and the student's return to school after serving the term of the suspension/expulsion even if an appeal is pending.

Finally, to keep us informed, we have directed MSDE to collect data on school arrests and referrals to the criminal justice or juvenile justice systems including specific data on referral of special education students whose conduct was determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability. We also ask that MSDE use all the data it collects to prepare meaningful reports for this Board to help us understand the progress being made by each school system in reducing the number of suspension and expulsions, thus, keeping students in school where they can learn and graduate college and career ready.

## **I. Why We Started To Study School Discipline.**

In 2009, we received a disciplinary case on appeal. The case involved the expulsion of a ninth grade student for the majority of the school year, during which time the student received intermittent homework assignments but no follow-up, grading, or other interaction with school personnel. Putting students out of school for long periods of time with very minimal education services raised our concern. Among other observations, we noted that it was unclear how returning a student to the school environment without having prepared either the school or the student could possibly advance the causes of school safety or student success. We decided then to look deeper into school discipline practices and policies in Maryland public schools.

## **II. How We Conducted Our Study.**

We conducted our study by looking at the suspension/expulsion data in Maryland, by reviewing the most recent national research on the effect of school discipline, and by asking the Maryland education community to give us their advice and comments on school discipline policy.

### **A. Maryland Suspension/Expulsion Data**

MSDE's *Suspension, Expulsions and Health Related Exclusions Report 2010-2011* (hereinafter Exclusions Report) gave us a wealth of data about in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in Maryland public schools. In the 2010-2011 school year, there were 852,211 students in Pre-K-12 in Maryland public schools. About 8% of those students, (66,955) were suspended or expelled (in and out-of-school).<sup>1</sup> Surprising to us, almost 85% of those students were suspended or expelled out of school (56,041).

The data told us the reasons for the out-of-school suspensions. We looked at whether out-of-school suspensions were issued for apparently non-violent conduct, such as refusal to obey school policies; insubordination; class disturbance; class disruption; threats to students and teachers; communication devices; alcohol; tobacco; sexual activity; cheating; inhalants. We found that approximately 54% of the students' suspended out-of-school (30,788) were suspended for what we consider non-violent offenses.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the National Center of Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov>., about 7% of students nationally are suspended or expelled (2006 data).

School Year 2010-2011 Number of Students Pre-K to 12 Suspended Out of School for Non-Violent Offenses Exclusions Report Table 7a	
Total # of Students Suspended Out of School	56,041 students
Refused to Obey School Policies	7,847 students
Insubordination	6,189 students
Class Disturbance	5,722 students
Disrespect	3,941 students
Class Disruption	2,654 students
Threats to Students and Teachers	2,067 students
Communication Devices	807 students
Alcohol	685 students
Tobacco	387 students
Sexual Activity	366 students
Cheating	109 students
Inhalants	14 students
Total # of Students Suspended Out of School for Non-Violent Offenses	30,788 students

Because some students were suspended more than once we also looked at the total number of suspensions and expulsions that were issued. There were a total of 129,294 suspensions (in and out-of-school) and expulsions issued. Of those, 95,866, (74%) of all suspensions/expulsions, were out-of-school. (*Exclusions Report*, Tables 8 and 8a). We looked at the reasons for the suspensions and found that 59,098 of the 95,866 out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (over 63%) were for apparently non-violent offenses.

For the first time, because of data collection changes we mandated in 2010, we were able to identify the number of students' suspended out-of-school for over 10 days. Long-term suspensions raise serious concerns about a student returning to school on track educationally. Of the 56,041 students suspended or expelled out-of-school, 2,201 were suspended or expelled for more than 10 days. (*Exclusions Report*, Table 14). We looked at the reasons for those suspensions and found that 448 students were suspended for over 10 days for apparently non-violent offenses.

School Year 2010-2011 Number of Students Suspended For Over 10 Days for Non-Violent Offenses	
Total # of Students Suspended for over 10 days	2,201 students
Refused to Obey School Policies	109 students
Inciting or Participating in Disruption	91 students
Threats Against Students and Teachers	89 students
Classroom Disruption	50 students
Disrespect	45 students
Tobacco/Cheating/Communication Devices	8 students
Total	448 students

Frequency of suspension also raised our concern. If a student is suspended out-of-school more than two times, especially for the same behavior, we have serious doubts that suspension is a technique that is working to help the student correct his/her behavior. If a student is suspended multiple times during the school year, that student will fall further and further behind and, we believe, will be more likely to drop out of school. Of the 56,041 students suspended out of school, 9,550 were suspended three or more times and 1,335 of those were suspended more than 5 times during the school year.

The Frequency that Students Were Suspended or Expelled Out of School School Year 2010-2011 Exclusions Report Table 5a						
Total # of Students Suspended Out of School	Suspended 1	Suspended 2	Suspended 3	Suspended 4	Suspended 5	Suspended More than 5
56,041	36,002	10,489	4,712	2,291	1,212	1,335

Another important finding of our study was that minority students continued to be disproportionately represented in the population of suspended and expelled students. For example, of the 66,955 students suspended (all suspensions, in and out-of-school), 57% (38,515) were African Americans (*Exclusions Report*, Tables 2 and 3).

The disproportionate representation of minority students, particularly African-American males, in the population of suspended and expelled students, is not new. It was previously documented in the 2007 *Report of the Task Force on the Education of Maryland's African American Males*. That report relied, in part, on data from the 2004-05 school year, when African Americans comprised of 59% (42,293) of the 71,085 students suspended (all types of suspensions, in-school and out-of-school). The Task Force expounded on the implications of its findings:

Twenty-five years of research show not just that African Americans are more often disciplined than White students, but that they're more harshly disciplined, too. And yet numerous studies investigating behavior, race, and discipline have yet to show that African-American students misbehave at a significantly higher rate than others, nor that their misbehavior is more serious. That is, no study to date has found differences in racial behavior sufficient to explain racial differences in school punishment.

More and more, researchers are looking to institutional procedures – such as those regarding discipline – to explain the difference. Those procedures, they're finding, are fraught with an alarming degree of subjectivity and act more as a perpetuator of racial order

than an objective arbiter of infraction and penalty. Discipline decisions are often colored by adults' perceptions of a student's appearance, neighborhood, family, and social background – all of which influence their perception of his behavior. In fact, in deciding punishment, the individual adult/student encounter often takes a back seat to racial and societal perceptions in general.

*(African American Male Task Force Report at 26).*

Despite shining a light on disproportionality, it seems that not much has changed in the five years since that Report was issued.

### **Conclusions We Drew From The Data**

We concluded two things from the data: (1) that we needed to reduce the number of suspensions for non-violent offenses; (2) that it is time for the disproportionate impact of discipline on minorities and discrepant impact special education students to end.<sup>2</sup>

#### **(1) Reducing the Number of Suspensions**

Putting over 30,000 students out-of-school every year for apparently non-violent conduct calls for a careful look at school discipline policies and the way they are applied and enforced. Thus, when a school administrator decides that suspension or expulsion is necessary, we expect that the decision will be made using discretion, considering all the facts of the case. We expect that the administrator will use suspensions and expulsions as a last resort. For students who are suspended or expelled, we expect that the principal or superintendent will be able to articulate what will be better for the student and the school after completion of the suspension/expulsion.

The superintendents and local boards asked that we leave the imposition of appropriate discipline in their hands. We agree. We will not propose school discipline reform that governs when out-of-school suspension may be imposed in our schools. We trust that our education partners will use out-of-school suspension judiciously, appropriately, and with discretion as the punishment of last resort for serious offenses. Knowing the negative consequences, particularly of long-term exclusion from school, it is our view, that out-of school-suspensions for over 10 days should be used only for violent, dangerous conduct. The regulations we propose, in the definitions of extended suspensions (11-45 school days) or expulsions (45 more school days) include that limitation.

As to defining violent/dangerous conduct, we looked at the various types of conduct and offenses that are possible under the State Code of Conduct. There are eight categories of offenses and thirty nine possible offenses spread across those categories. They are:

---

<sup>2</sup> The discrepancy between suspensions of disabled and non-disabled students has been subject of study by MSDE and corrective action by school systems.

**Attendance**

- 101 Class Cutting
- 102 Tardiness
- 103 Truancy

**Dangerous Substances**

- 201 Alcohol
- 202 Inhalants
- 203 Drugs
- 204 Tobacco
- 891 Sells or Solicits Sale of Controlled Substance
- 892 Possesses or Uses Illegal Drugs

**Weapons**

- 301 Firearms
- 302 Other Guns
- 303 Other Weapons
- 893 Carries a Weapon to School or School Function

**Attack/Threats/Fighting**

- 401 Physical Attack – Teacher/Staff
- 402 Physical Attack - Student
- 403 Verbal or Physical Threat to Teacher, Staff or Others
- 404 Verbal or Physical Threat to Student
- 405 Fighting
- 406 Extortion
- 407 Bullying
- 408 Serious Bodily Injury

**Arson/Fire/Explosives**

- 501 Arson/Fire
- 502 False Alarm/Bomb Threat
- 503 Explosives

**Sex Offenses**

- 601 Sexual Assault
- 602 Sexual Harassment
- 603 Sexual Activity

**Disrespect/Insubordination/Disruption**

- 701 Disrespect
- 702 Insubordination
- 703 Harassment
- 704 Classroom Disruption
- 705 Inciting/Participating in Disturbance

**Other**

- 801 Academic Dishonesty/Cheating
- 802 Portable Communication Devices
- 803 Theft
- 804 Trespassing
- 805 Unauthorized Sale or Distribution
- 806 Vandalism/Destruction of Property
- 807 Refusal to Obey School Policies

Each of those offenses is defined in the Maryland Student Records Manual, some with precision, some not. Some categories seem duplicative or redundant. We understand that several years ago the Department convened a workgroup to recommend changes to the State Code of Conduct and the definitions. Their work was stayed until we conducted our study. It is time to take up that work again. When appointing the State Code of Conduct Workgroup, we ask the State Superintendent to include one or more State Board members in the group.

Previously in this Report, we defined the reasons for suspensions that appeared to us to be non-violent. The rest fell in the “violent” category. We were possibly over-inclusive in the violent category because some of those offenses could very well be considered non-violent based on the actual conduct involved. For example, the drug category is not always reflective of violent or dangerous conduct. We know that is the case given the recent spate of out-of-state news articles about students suspended for bringing over-the-counter medicines to school for their own use and failing to follow school policies. That is clearly not a violent offense, and it is highly likely not a dangerous one.

Similarly, what might appear to be a non-violent offense may, under the circumstances, present a danger of harm to others in school. The sale of alcohol or inhalants may fall into that category. The circumstances will govern whether the conduct is violent or dangerous, and we leave that decision to the local school systems. We point out, however, that our data show that in Maryland approximately 54% of the students suspended out of school were suspended for conduct that is not apparently violent or dangerous. Thus, to address this issue, we would like the State Code of Conduct Workgroup to develop a coding system that allows a school system to

code each suspension issued as one for violent/dangerous conduct or for non-violent/non-dangerous conduct.

We plan to review each school system's suspension data annually. We will ask school systems to do the same to pinpoint where out-of-school suspensions seem to be being used ineffectively and inappropriately.

## (2) Ending Disproportionate Impact

We concluded from the data that it is time for disproportionate impact to end. We recognize that MSDE analyzes the data in MSDE's yearly *Suspensions, Expulsions, and Health Related Exclusion Reports* disaggregating it by race and gender and discussing that data on-site with each local school system. Additional analysis is needed, however, to determine whether or to what extent each school system's discipline is meted out in a way that has a disproportionate impact on African Americans and on other minorities.

We also know that MSDE's Special Education Division collects data on the impact of school discipline on special education students. They have developed a formula and a process for assessing the discrepancy between disciplines meted out to disabled students compared to non-disabled students. If disabled students are disciplined at a rate 2 times greater than non-disabled students, the school system is notified that it has "significant discrepancy" in its disciplinary processes which must be corrected in one year. The school system's performance is monitored by MSDE.

Disproportionate or discrepant discipline is, we believe, related to the achievement gap. Understanding that relationship is critical. Closing that gap, by improving student learning and performance, needs to be among our highest priorities. Therefore, we propose a regulation that requires MSDE to analyze the impact of school discipline on minority students and special education students within each school system. When MSDE determines that a disproportionate or discrepant impact exists, our proposed regulation requires that the school system present to this Board a plan designed to reduce the impact within one year and to eliminate that impact within three years. The school system will report annually to the State Board, and we will analyze and discuss the results of the school system's effort.

We know that there are school systems in Maryland who are already sensitive to the issue of race and discipline. For example, we know Talbot County, Calvert County, and Montgomery County participate in "Courageous Conversations About Race." We understand that the Black and Hispanic Conference of Boards of Education in Maryland are interested in the school discipline and disproportionate impact issues. We note that MSDE's Division of Student, Family, and School Support has several staff members researching a tool called "The Intercultural Development Inventory" which combines PBIS with cross cultural leadership and decision-making. MSDE and Open Society Institute are partnering to bring resources to local school systems through professional development opportunities with national experts on the subjects of disproportionate suspension and alternatives to suspension. Practitioners will receive individually designed resources to enhance their ability to manage challenging behaviors with alternatives to suspension. They will receive professional development opportunities that are job specific.

We ask the Superintendent to convene a School Discipline Best Practices Work Group. These groups and other interested persons should be considered for membership.

Another type of impact also concerns us. In July 2011, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and Attorney General, Eric Holder, announced the launch of the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, a collaborative project between the Departments of Justice and Education that will address the “school-to-prison pipeline” and the disciplinary policies and practices that can push students out of school and into the justice system. The initiative aims to support good discipline practices and to foster safe and productive learning environments in every classroom. For the first time, the USDE and the DOJ will collect data from school systems with over 3,000 students on the number of school arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system.

We have never collected such data. From our panel presenters, and from the school discipline appeals we receive, we have anecdotal evidence of referrals to juvenile justice, sometimes for minor offenses. We do not, however, have the data to know for sure whether there is school-to-prison pipeline in Maryland schools. To address this issue, we shall begin to collect school arrest and referral data in the 2013-2014 school year by adopting a data reporting procedure through the Student Records Manual to ascertain, at minimum:

- Number of school arrests, who made the arrest, and reason for referrals to criminal justice or to juvenile justice disaggregated by school system, race, ethnicity, special education, gender, age, grade, etc.
- Number of special education students by school system whose conduct was determined to be a manifestation of their disability who were referred to juvenile justice and the reason for the referral.

## **B. Research and Reports**

We looked at research and reports related to the economic impact of suspensions and the impact of suspensions on school safety.

### (1) Economic Impacts Research

We know that as Maryland ramps up its standards, expecting that all students will graduate from high school ready for college or career, students who are suspended frequently or for long periods of time will likely not graduate, let alone be college and career ready. We know that being separated from school is detrimental to students. In *MSDE's 2012 Report on Education Services*, MSDE explained:

- Suspensions are a major factor leading to the decision to drop out of school. On average, in Maryland approximately 8,800 students drop out of school per year.
- Dropouts are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Students who drop out of school often end up in the adult criminal justice system.

We know that separating students from school is detrimental to families and the community. In the short-term, an out-of school suspension causes disruption in the family home. If parents or guardians are working, the suspended student is left to his/her own devices, unsupervised. If the parent or guardian decides to miss work and stay home with the student, there could very well be an adverse financial impact on the family. In the long-term, exclusionary policies add to the growing number of citizens lacking the basic educational skills to support themselves. They have a greater need for social services, like public assistance. Estimates indicate that a high school drop-out can cost society hundreds of thousands of dollars over his lifetime due to dependency on government assistance. Even if they are able to find work, drop outs are disadvantaged in their earning capacity compared to high school graduates. See *MSDE's 2010 Report on Educational Services*.

But, it is not just the possible drain on societal resources that compels school discipline reform. More important, it is the contribution that students who are educated and graduate college and career ready make to society and the economy. Researchers have asked which is more important for economic growth – a cadre of high performers or bringing everyone up to the basic level of performance. They found that both were critical for economic growth. “Some workers need a high level of skill so they can help adapt the new technologies in their countries’ particular situation. In countries on the technological frontier, substantial number of scientists, engineers, and other innovators are obviously needed. But so is a labor force that has the basic skills needed to survive in a technology driven economy.”<sup>3</sup> As we have stated, every student who stays in school and graduates college and career ready adds to the health and wealth of this State and this Country.

## (2) Research on the Impact of School Discipline on School Safety.

Because we all want safe schools, we often rely on a presumption that separating disorderly students from school will make schools safer places to learn for those students who are not disruptive. The presumption is not necessarily supported by the recent research which raises serious questions about the effectiveness of using out-of-school suspensions as a means of

---

<sup>3</sup> Hanushek, Woessman, Jamison, & Jamison. “Education and Economic Growth,” *Education Next*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Spring 2008.

providing a safe school.<sup>4</sup> (*Losen & Skiba* 2010).

Some have argued that suspensions remove disorderly students and deter other students from misbehaving, thereby improving the school environment so that well-behaving students can learn without distractions . . . . Yet, despite nearly two decades of implementation of zero tolerance disciplinary policies and their application to mundane and non-violent misbehavior, there is no evidence that frequent reliance on removing misbehaving students improves school safety or student behavior.

*Id.* at 2; *see also*, *Breaking Schools' Rules* at 4.

The American Psychological Association's 2006 Zero Tolerance Task Force explains that the assumption that the removal of disruptive students will result in a safer school, although a strongly intuitive assumption, is not supported by the data.

---

<sup>4</sup> We read and were influenced, in part, by recent national reports on school discipline issues: Losen, *Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice* (2010); <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/discipline-policies>

Losen and Skiba, *Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis* (2010); <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/suspended-education>

Darensbourg, Perez, Blake, *Overrepresentation of African American Males in Exclusionary Discipline: The Role of School Based Mental Health Professionals in Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline*, *Journal of African American Male Education*, 2010, Vol. 1, Issue 3. <http://journalofafricanamericanmales.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/09/Overrepresentation-of-African-American-Males-Alicia-Darensbourg-.pdf>

Krezmien, Leone, Zablocki, Wells, *Juvenile Court Referrals and the Public Schools: Nature and the Extent of the Practice in Five States*, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 2010; <http://ccj.sagepub.com/content/26/3/273.abstract>

*Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations*, A Report by American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006); <http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>

*Breaking School Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Student's Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement*, (2011); <http://justicecenter.csg.org/resources/juveniles>

Skiba, Rausch, Ritter, *Discipline Is Always Teaching*, *Center for Evaluation and Education Policy* (2005); <http://gwired.gwu.edu/hamfish/merlin-cgi>

“[D]ata on a number of indicators of school climate have shown the opposite effect that is schools with higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions appear to have *less* satisfactory rating of school climate, *less* satisfactory school governance structures, and to spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary matters. Perhaps more importantly, recent research indicates a negative relationship between the use of school suspension and expulsion and school-wide academic achievement, even when controlling for demographics such as socioeconomic status. Although such findings do not demonstrate causality, it becomes difficult to argue that zero tolerance creates more positive school climates when its use is associated with more negative achievement outcomes.”

*Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools, An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations* at 4-5. (emphasis in original).

If out-of-school suspensions do not necessarily create safer schools, we asked if they served some other worthy societal purpose. In this regard, we recognized that there are several reasons why a society metes out punishment for bad behavior:<sup>5</sup>

- Retribution: to right a wrong by giving the person his “just deserts” in the form of a punishment appropriate to the harm caused.
- Incapacitation/Deterrence: to deter future bad conduct by making it impossible for the offender to offend again and showing others that a like offense will be punished as severely.
- Rehabilitation: to provide correction to the offender and turn him around.

### **Conclusions We Drew From the Research**

We concluded that in the school context, suspensions for retribution purposes have no place at all. Suspensions for deterrence purposes, while they may make us think that the schools are safer, do not necessarily serve that purpose. Indeed, as the American Psychological Associations Zero Tolerance Task Force Report states: “Rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption, however, school suspension in general appears to predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspensions among those students who are suspended.” *Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools, An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations* at 5.

We learned from this research that our goal as educators should be a rehabilitative one - - to improve the student, not to disadvantage those student who may be most in need of our help. Indeed, we must keep our eye on the prize – eliminating the achievement gap and graduating college and career ready students – even in the heat of the school discipline process.

---

<sup>5</sup> See, Carlsmith, Darley, Robinson, *Why Do We Punish*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83 No. 2, 284-299; See also, Banks, *Ethics and the Criminal Justice System*, Chapter 5, *The Purpose of Criminal Punishment* 103-126, [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/5144\\_Banks\\_II\\_Proof\\_Chapter\\_5.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/5144_Banks_II_Proof_Chapter_5.pdf)

In our proposed regulatory changes, we announce that philosophy by amending 13A.08.01.11A to require each local board of education adopt a set of regulations that:

- (1) Reflect a rehabilitative discipline philosophy based on the goals of fostering, teaching, and acknowledging positive behavior;
- (2) Are designed to keep students in school so that they may graduate college and career ready;
- (3) Prohibit disciplinary policies that trigger automatic discipline without the use of discretion;
- (4) Explain why and how long-term suspensions or expulsions are last resort options.

There are numerous and startling examples of how moving away from a punitive discipline model to a rehabilitative one works to improve school safety and academic achievement. The work Baltimore City Public Schools has done to restructure its discipline policies is commendable and a Best Practice. PBIS comes to mind also as a Best Practice.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is in place in 745 of the 1,424 public schools.

<b>School Level</b>	<b>Trained</b>	<b>Implementing</b>
Elementary	430	387
Elementary/Middle	29	23
High	126	100
Intermediate	4	4
K-12	2	1
K-8	8	7
Middle	210	175
Middle/High	3	3
PreK	3	3
Special/Alternative	61	42
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>745</b>

PBIS makes it possible for schools to:

- Increase consistent use of positive teaching and reinforcement strategies among all school staff at school-wide, classroom and individual student levels;
- Reduce the use of reactive discipline measures (i.e. office discipline referrals, detentions, suspensions, expulsions) for all students;
- Increase data-based decision-making about behavior and academic instruction and reinforcement across all settings; and
- Implement effective comprehensive supports, services and interventions for students with the most intensive behavioral and emotional needs.

The three-tiered public health prevention logic model includes:

- At the primary level, universal interventions which target ALL students.

These interventions are projected to positively impact approximately 80-90% of students.

- At the secondary level, targeted interventions for those students who are “non-responders” to the universal strategies. These interventions are projected to be effective with approximately 10-20% of students.
- At the tertiary level, intensive interventions targeting individual students for whom neither the universal nor targeted strategies provide adequate support. These interventions are projected to impact approximately 1-5% of students.

Johns Hopkins University has conducted extensive research through three initiatives (Project Target, PBIS Plus, and MDS3) which produced findings supporting the use of PBIS in Maryland Schools. It is clear that when PBIS is implemented with *fidelity*, it can produce significant positive outcomes reducing *school level suspensions* and improving the *organizational health* of the school. Students in PBIS schools were *32% less likely to receive and office discipline referral*.

But that is not all - - We point out that a good number of PBIS schools show improvement in academic achievement. A comparison over a five year period (2003-2008) of Anne Arundel County schools implementing PBIS with non-PBIS schools revealed that the PBIS schools have a higher percentage of students who achieved in the Advanced and Proficient ranges on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) for reading and math in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. Also, in “Exemplar Ideas,” PBIS schools in Maryland anecdotally report that academic achievement improves when PBIS strategies governing behavior and discipline are in place and implemented by teachers and staff. See [www.pbismaryland.org](http://www.pbismaryland.org). That outcome further supports the connection we make between school discipline reform and our education reform efforts.

Yet, in Maryland, PBIS implementation has been generally at the “universal” intervention level. To address the needs of those 2,201 students suspended for more than 10 days a year and the 9,550 who were suspended three or more times a year, Maryland schools need to move forward to adopt the PBIS secondary and tertiary levels. Howard County Public School System has done so and we hope they will lead the way for other school systems in Maryland by sharing Best Practices and experiences.

We understand that implementing the secondary and tertiary levels of PBIS will take local resources. We ask the State Superintendent to work with school systems to identify which schools would need to implement those levels of intervention. The time is now to begin planning for an expanded PBIS initiative, particularly in those schools that have a high number of students in proportion to their school population who were suspended long-term or frequently.

We have included in the appendix of this Report two articles describing non-punitive approaches to school discipline. They illustrate the type of school discipline reform we are

advocating.<sup>6</sup>

As we state over and over in this Report, school discipline and academic success are interrelated concepts. We know that effective instruction and classroom management is the key. Each school system's Master Plan, in the Great Teachers/Great Leaders section, now addresses school safety issues in general and suspensions in particular. We recommend that in that section local school systems laser focus on the interrelationships among instruction, school discipline, reducing the achievement gap, and preparing college and career ready students.

### **C. Panels, Presentations, and Comments**

Over the course of our two year study we heard from hundreds of educators, parents, and students. (See Appendix). We asked school system administrators, advocates, parents, students, and teachers to tell us about the timeliness of the disciplinary process, how fairly it was implemented, and what problems they encountered. We learned that:

- School administrators believe that, for the most part, they move timely and fairly through the disciplinary process and that no changes are necessary to the statutes or regulations that govern that process.
- Advocates believe that the process is not consistently timely or fair. Anecdotally, they gave us examples of such unfairness which they assert require statutory or regulatory changes to prevent.
- Parents/students emphasized the need to provide education services during the time of suspension. They also provided anecdotal evidence of unfairness in the process.
- Teachers said suspension should be the consequence of last resort. They emphasized the critical importance of keeping students in school whenever possible and providing high quality education services during the period of suspension.

In addition to the advice we received from the panels of presenters, we asked the education community for their comments on our draft Report in February 2012 . We received hundreds. About a third of the commenters reflected a belief that changing school discipline policies to reflect a rehabilitative goal aimed at keeping students in school could make schools unsafe for students who were not discipline problems and would interfere with their learning. The following comment reflects the views of this group.

With regard to the majority of students that are in school to learn, I have to wonder, who at the state level, is looking out for them. As a high school and middle school teacher, I can confirm that students who want to learn are regularly subjected to disruptive, disrespectful, and insubordinate behavior. When teachers have to

---

<sup>6</sup> Skiba, Rausch, Ritter: *Discipline is Always Teaching: Effective Alternatives to Zero Tolerance in Schools*, <http://gwired.gwu.edu/hamfish/merlin-cgi> ; *Lincoln High School Tries A New Approach to School Discipline*, <http://acestoohigh.com/2012/04/23> .

deal with these behaviors during class, valuable instruction time is lost – for ALL STUDENTS . . . . As a teacher, it is my job to protect and nurture learning and the learning environment. If chronically disruptive and insubordinate students are given even more leeway than they currently have with regard to consequences for their actions, I cannot protect students who want to learn and provide the safe, nurturing environment that we all know is best for students to be successful.

Another group of 20 or so commenters strongly supported the tenor and purpose of school discipline reform. This commenter reflected that view:

As a parent and an educator, I feel suspensions are detrimental to the students' academic progress. I believe students should have consequences for their behavior, but failure in their classes for the days they are suspended should not be an option . . . nor should putting the students behind and making them try to catch up. Many of the students with behaviors which cause them to become suspended are often acting out because of personal issues in their lives. Those issues may very well be their struggles in school academically, socially, athletically, etc. . . So, putting them farther behind in their schoolwork, giving them failing grades that adversely affect their term grades, and sending them away as if they are not deserving to be in school are not the ways to improve student behaviors.

Finally, the remaining commenters had numerous suggestions on how to improve or change the direction we were taking in reforming school discipline. They suggested:

- Convene Statewide Task Forces
- Additional Work Needs to Be Done
- Approach Discipline from a Different Philosophy
- Emphasize Professional Development
- Alternative Education and Minimum Education Services Is Necessary But Expensive
- Disproportionate Discipline is Difficult to Address
- There is generally an Open and Timely Process in place in schools
- Arrest Data is Essential
- Violent v. Non-Violent Conduct is Difficult to Delineate
- Address School Systems with Higher Than Average Suspension Rates Should Report Annually to the Board
- Focus on Data Collection

We discussed each of those topics in detail at our May and June 2012 Board meetings.

## Conclusions We Drew From the Response of the Education Community

We concluded from reviewing the community responses that (1) we needed to be clear about why we were engaging in school discipline reform; (2) that despite the obstacles, providing education services to suspended students remained a top priority; and (3) that the draft regulation needed some changes.

### (1) Clarity of Explanation

Because so many commenters felt that reforming school discipline by focusing on keeping students in school would be detrimental to “good students”, we concluded that we needed to be crystal clear about our rationale for engaging in this reform effort. That rationale, announced at the beginning of this Report, is based on the fact that few, if any, students are academically and behaviorally “perfect” when they arrive at the school door. They come to learn and we teach them, not just how to read, write, and calculate, but also how to conduct themselves in a civil society. When they do not conduct themselves appropriately, school discipline policies will apply. Those policies need to be based on a rehabilitative philosophy. Those policies need to reflect that suspension or expulsion is truly a last resort because a student who is suspended misses days of learning time, often difficult to make up. A student who is suspended frequently or for too long misses so much learning time that he is at risk for dropping out. We repeat: *Every student who stays in school and graduates, college and career ready, adds to the health and wealth of the State of Maryland and improves the global competitiveness of this country.*

We also repeat that, because the research does not support a correlation between out-of-school suspensions and a safer school, we have no basis to adopt a “more suspensions the better” philosophy. We understand that many think intuitively that if disruptive students are suspended the school will be safer. The data does not support that conclusion. Indeed, it appears that more suspensions may breed less-safe schools. See Reports cited herein at \_\_\_\_\_, fn. 3.

### (2) Minimum Education Services

We have heard from the education community that there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to provision of educational services to suspended students. We agree. Yet, we want school staff to make every effort to keep all suspended students connected to the school. This is hardly a new concept. As explained in the MSDE’s *2010 Report on Education Services*, numerous Task Forces from 1974 to the present have recommended that school systems provide students who are separated from school with alternative educational services. Indeed, there is a statute that requires local boards to “establish special programs in the county and Baltimore City for students . . . who exhibit disruptive classroom behavior.” Md. Educ. Code Ann. §7-304. MSDE’s *2010 Report on Education Services* recommends that school systems take a close look at the type of educational services they provide to suspended students.

For those school systems that have alternative education programs, that resource can be used to keep students connected to the school community. In Maryland, a variety of alternative school models exist, but the quality of education services provided varies. In order to help local school systems that are forming and/or operating alternative schools to provide programming that is effective, the Department developed standards for alternative programs. They are

contained in the Maryland Dropout/School Completion Resource Guide. We urge Maryland school systems with alternative education programs to work with MSDE staff to implement the standards.

We know that smaller school systems especially are challenged by budget, staff, and other resources to provide meaningful education services to their long-term suspended students. We encourage them to form consortia. With the many advances in technology available today, together they may be able to explore on-line learning, live feeds from classrooms, or develop curriculum aligned podcasts for a student to view classes while he/she is at home on a suspension. This could also be an option for providing educational programming to students on in-school suspension.

We know that some school systems have innovative approaches to providing education services to student on in-school and out-of-school suspension. Sharing that knowledge and practice with each other is essential. We know that some local school system staff and hearing officers are interested in starting this discussion. We ask the State Superintendent to prime the pump, thru the work of the School Discipline Best Practices Workgroup she will appoint, to start the discussion and to report periodically to the Board on Best Practices in Maryland and other states.

During the time period in which the local school systems will be designing, implementing or improving their alternative education programs, we have proposed a regulation to define minimum education services. If a student is not assigned to an alternative program, he/she should receive minimum education services - - which are daily classroom work, corrected and returned to the student, with at least one staff person assigned to be the liaison between teachers and the various students on out-of-school suspension. We know that, because of limited resources, this is not a popular resolution to the problem of keeping up with school work, nor is it an ideal resolution. We do not underestimate the burden this requirement will impose on teachers. Nor do we underestimate the cost and the burden on other school administrative staff to maintain contact with suspended students. Yet, we cannot stand by and do nothing. As we have said repeatedly in this Report, we are committed to providing all our students with an education that will make them college and career ready.

Providing at least minimal educational services to all suspended or expelled students is one small step toward reaching that goal. We, of course, encourage school systems to use flexibility and creativity in developing their minimum education services plan in a way that utilizes new technologies, new research, parent involvement groups, peer support groups, school volunteers or any other approach that keeps the suspended student connected to school and on the path to graduate college and career ready.

The regulatory requirement to provide those minimum education services gives meaning to our current regulations governing education services for suspended students. Specifically, under COMAR 13A.08.01.03(H), local school systems are required to give suspended students an opportunity to make up class work missed during a suspension. Because the absences for any

suspended student for any period of time are considered excused absences,<sup>7</sup> those students are entitled by law to make up all school work. They cannot do so if school work is not provided to them, if it is not corrected or checked, and if contact with the student is not maintained during the period of suspension.

### (3) Changes to the Regulations

Many of the comments we received were directed at changing the draft regulations we had included in our draft Report. We used the comments to guide our discussion of the regulations we would propose for publication. Those regulations are set forth below on pp. 19-25.

In amending the draft regulations based on the comments received, we did the following:

- (1) Continued our non-prescriptive approach, leaving it to local school systems to decide when to impose discipline using discretion.
- (2) Directed that school discipline policy in Maryland is to be based on the rehabilitation goals of fostering and teaching positive behavior and the use of discretion in imposing discipline. *See* 13A.08.01.11A.
- (3) Reinstated the term expulsion and defined it to mean total exclusion of a student from the student's regular school program for 45 school days or longer for conduct that the superintendent determines, on a case by case basis, is violent or poses a serious danger of physical harm to others in the school.
- (4) We also re-defined extended suspension to mean the temporary removal of a student from the student's regular school program for a time period between 11-45 school days for conduct that the superintendent determines, on a case by case basis, poses a danger of harm to others in the school.
- (5) Because we agreed with the commenters who said that it was too broadly worded and not in line with our other proposed regulations, we deleted 13A.08.01.11C which stated:  
C. Suspensions and Expulsions
  - (1) In those instances when the behavior of a student is disruptive and detrimental to the operation of the school, the student may be suspended or, if appropriate, expelled pursuant to COMAR 13A.08.01.12-1.
  - (6) Left in place the Minimum Education Services as regulation encouraging local school system flexibility and creativity in implementing the regulation in a variety of ways with an eye toward keeping the student on track with classroom work.
  - (7) Left in place the Disproportionate/Discrepant Impact regulation.
  - (8) Left in place the arrest data collection draft regulation.

In the regulations that we propose to publish, we have focused on the openness, timeliness, and fairness of the disciplinary process. If a suspension over 10 days is being considered, we propose that, if there were to be a delay in completing the process beyond the 10 day suspension period, that the student be readmitted to school pending the Superintendent's decision unless the Superintendent determines that the conduct at issue was violent, dangerous,

---

<sup>7</sup> We have directed MSDE to inform school systems that when they report chronic absentee data, they must include the days a student was suspended or expelled out of school.

or a threat to the safety of the school. In addition, if a decision is made to suspend or expel a student, we propose that the student be allowed to return to school after serving the term of the suspension or expulsion whether or not an appeal is pending. Both the school system panelists and the advocate panelists generally supported these changes, particularly the return of the student to school after the full term of the suspension is served even if an appeal is pending.

The regulations we propose will implement timeliness in the process. Some were concerned that the 30 day/10 day appeal timeline was not feasible. We chose not to change that timeline at this time, but will consider changes later based on evidence that the timeline does not work. We propose, as well, a requirement that, prior to a hearing, a school system share documents and a witness list with the student's representative. That requirement was a request of the advocates. It resonated with our belief that the disciplinary process be fair and even-handed.

The advocate panelists noted that the written information provided to non-English speaking parents during the suspension process needs to be translated into the parents' native language in order for meaningful due process to occur. We concur. Moreover, for a fair hearing process to occur an interpreter needs to be provided. We concur. Because these requirements are directly related to due process issues, we believe they are already required by law. We will not propose a duplicative regulation, but we emphasize that school systems must be cognizant of and meet the needs of their non-English speaking parents.

We have re-defined in the proposed regulations short-term suspensions (1-3 school days); long-term suspensions (4-10 school days); extended suspensions (11-45 school days); and expulsion (over 45 school days). Those definitions reflect our philosophy that time out of school should be the shortest possible based on the offense. Particularly, we re-examined the premise set forth in our existing regulations that a short-term suspension is any suspension lasting 10 days or less. COMAR 13A.08.01.11(B)(6). That 10-day time frame seemed to be based on the statute giving a principal the unilateral authority to suspend a student for up to 10 days. Md. Educ. Code. Ann. §7-305(a). By statute, only the superintendent can suspend a student for more than 10 days. *Id.* at 7-305(b).

We asked whether using the 10-day time period to define a "short-term suspension" was appropriate. Is missing two full weeks of school a short time period in a world in which students must be prepared to graduate college and career ready? We think not. Indeed, in schools with block scheduling, the ten day suspension can translate into 20 class days missed. Ten day suspensions have far ranging, negative impacts on meeting our commitments to reduce the achievement gap and to produce a productive and sustainable workforce which can compete globally. Thus, we concluded that the 10-day span is too significant an amount of time to lose from class to consider it a "short" time. Therefore, we propose a regulation that changes the definition of short-term suspension to a suspension for up to 3 days.

We recognize, of course, that a principal retains the statutory right to suspend a student for up to 10 days, but that will no longer be coded a "short-term suspension" when reporting discipline data.

### III. Proposed Regulations

#### COMAR 13A.08.01.10

Amendments in *italics*

Deletions in brackets

#### **.10 Guidelines for Students' Responsibilities and Rights.**

A. Each local board of education shall have a document on students' responsibilities and rights.

B. This document shall conform to guidelines established by the State Board of Education.

C. The local document shall be disseminated periodically to all members of the school community, including students, teachers, administrators, and parents or guardians.

D. There shall be broad involvement of representatives of the school community in the review of the document.

#### **.11 Disciplinary Action.**

A. Local Regulations. Each local board of education shall adopt a set of regulations [designed to maintain an environment of order and discipline necessary for effective learning. These regulations should provide for counseling and standards for appropriate disciplinary measures, and may permit suspension or expulsion] *that:*

(1) *Reflect a rehabilitative discipline philosophy based on the goals of fostering, teaching, and acknowledging positive behavior;*

(2) *Are designed to keep students in school so that they may graduate college and career ready;*

(3) *Prohibit disciplinary policies that trigger automatic discipline without the use of discretion;*

(4) *Explain why and how long-term suspensions or expulsions are last resort options.*

B. Terms Defined. In this regulation, the following terms have the meanings indicated:

(1) "Confer" means a discussion or dialogue by any means, for example, telephone, electronic mail, or face-to-face meeting, where the views of the teacher are communicated and considered.

(2) "Expulsion" means, [at a minimum, the removal of the student from the student's regular school program and may be further defined by a local board of education] *the total exclusion of a student from the student's regular school program for 45 school days or longer for conduct that the superintendent determines, on a case by case basis, is violent or poses a serious danger of physical harm to others in the school.*

(3) "Extended suspension" means the temporary removal of a student from [school for a specified period of time longer than 10 school days for disciplinary reasons by the local superintendent or the local superintendent's designated representative] *the student's regular school program for a time period between 11-45 school days for conduct that the superintendent determines, on a case by case basis, poses a danger of harm to others in the school.*

(4) "In-school suspension" means the removal within the school building of a student from the student's current education program for up to but not more than 10 school days in a school year for disciplinary reasons by the school principal.

(5) "*Long-term suspension*" means the removal of a student from school for a time period between 4-10 days for disciplinary reasons by the principal.

[(5)] (6) "Principal" means the principal of a school or the principal's designee.

[(6)] (7) "Short-term suspension" means the removal of a student from school for up to but not more than [10] 3 school days for disciplinary reasons by the principal.

[(7)] (8) "Suspension" means the application of extended suspension, in-school suspension, or short-term suspension *or long-term suspension*.

### [C. Suspension and Expulsion.]

[(1)] In those instances when the behavior of a student is disruptive and detrimental to the operation of the school, the student may be suspended or expelled.]

### [(2)] C. (1) In-School Suspension.

(a) An in-school removal is not considered a day of suspension as long as the student is afforded the opportunity to continue to:

- (i) Appropriately progress in the general curriculum;
- (ii) Receive the special education and related services specified on the student's IEP, if the student is a student with a disability in accordance with COMAR 13A.05.01;
- (iii) Receive instruction commensurate with the program afforded to the student in the regular classroom; and
- (iv) Participate with peers as they would in their current education program to the extent appropriate.

(b) A student may not receive an in-school suspension unless the student has been informed of the reasons for the suspension and has been given an opportunity to respond before the suspension becomes effective.

(c) The school principal shall provide the student's parents with written notification of the in-school suspension action taken by the school.

(d) After 10 days of cumulative in-school suspension, the student, the student's parents or guardian, and the principal shall confer.

(e) The student's school of current enrollment shall make provision for the student's education during the period of in-school suspension.

(f) Local school systems shall develop policies pertaining to a student's participation in extracurricular activities if the student receives an in-school suspension.

(g) Local school systems shall develop and implement a behavioral program of positive interventions to address the causes of misbehavior as part of the in-school suspension.

### [(3)] (2) Suspension for Not More Than 10 Days.

(a) In accordance with the rules and regulations of the local board, each principal of a public school may suspend for cause, for not more than 10 school days, any student in the school who is under the direction of the principal.

(b) The student or the student's parent or guardian promptly shall be given a conference with the principal and any other appropriate personnel during the suspension period.

(c) At or before the conference, the student shall receive oral or written notice of the charges against him or her. If the student denies the charges, the student has the right to an

explanation of the evidence supporting the charges and an opportunity to present the student's side of the story.

(d) A student whose presence in school poses a continuing danger to persons or property or an ongoing threat of disrupting the academic process may be removed immediately from school, if the notice and conference required by this subsection is provided as soon as possible.

(e) If the principal finds that an extended suspension or expulsion is warranted, the principal immediately shall report the matter in writing to the local superintendent

[(4)] (3) Suspension for More than 10 Days or Expulsion.

(a) At the request of the principal, a local superintendent or the designated representative may suspend a student for more than 10 school days or expel the student.

(b) Upon receipt of a written report from a principal requesting an extended suspension or an expulsion the local superintendent or designated representative promptly shall make a thorough investigation of the matter.

(c) If after the investigation the local superintendent or designated representative finds that [a longer] *an extended* suspension or *an* expulsion is warranted, the superintendent or designated representative promptly shall arrange a conference with the student and the student's parent or guardian.

*(d) The process described in (a)-(c) of this section of the regulation shall be completed by the 10<sup>th</sup> school day of the initial suspension. If additional time is necessary to complete the process, the student shall be allowed to return to school, unless the local superintendent or designated representative determines that the conduct at issue was violent, dangerous, or a threat to the safety of the school.*

[(d)] (e) If after the conference the local superintendent or designated representative finds that *an extended* suspension [of more than 10 school days] or *an* expulsion is warranted, the student or the student's parent or guardian may[:] [(i)] [A] appeal to the local board within 10 days after the determination;

[(ii) Be heard before the local board or its designated committee; and]

[(iii) Bring counsel and witnesses to the hearing.]

*(f) If an appeal is filed, it shall be heard before the local board or its designated committee, or hearing officer and completed within 30 days of the date of appeal was received by the local board.*

*(g) The student or the student's parent or guardian:*

*(a) shall be provided the school system's witness list and a copy of the documents that the school system will present at the hearing five days before hearing;*

*(b) may bring counsel and witnesses to the hearing.*

*(h) The local board shall issue its decision within 10 days after the close of the hearing.*

[(e)] (i) Unless a public hearing is requested by the parent or guardian of the student, a hearing shall be held out of the presence of all individuals except those whose presence is considered necessary or desirable by the board.

[(f)] (j) The appeal to the local board does not stay the decision of the county superintendent.

[(g)] (k) The decision of the local board is final.

[(5)] (4) A student expelled [under] or suspended from school shall remain away from the school premises during those hours each school day when the school the student attends is in

session, and may not participate in school-sponsored activities. The expelled or suspended student may return to the school premises during the prohibited hours only for attendance at a previously scheduled appointment, and if the student is a minor then only if accompanied by the student's parent or guardian.

*(5) A student suspended or expelled from school shall be allowed to return to school on the day that the terms and conditions of the suspension or expulsion are met whether or not the student, parent, or guardian has filed an appeal of the suspension.*

(6) If a student has been suspended or expelled, the principal may not return the student to the classroom without conferring with the teacher who referred the student to the principal, if the student was referred by a teacher, other teachers as appropriate, other appropriate school personnel, the student, and the student's parent or guardian.

(7) If a student's disruptive behavior results in action less than suspension, the principal shall confer with the teacher who referred the student to the principal before returning the student to that teacher's classroom. The principal may satisfy this requirement by consulting with the teacher before returning the student to the classroom.

(8) A local superintendent may deny attendance to a student who is currently expelled or on extended suspension from another school system for a length of time equal to that expulsion or extended suspension. A school system shall forward information to another school system relating to the discipline of a student, including information of an expulsion or extended suspension of the student, on receipt of the request for information.

D. Restitution. Unless the student is referred to the Department of Juvenile Services, if a student violates a State or local law or regulation and during or as a result of the commission of that violation damaged, destroyed, or substantially decreased the value of school property or property of another that was on school property at the time of the violation, as part of a conference on the matter with the student, the student's parent or guardian, and other appropriate individual, the principal shall require the student or the student's parent or guardian to make restitution. The restitution may be made in the form of monetary restitution not to exceed the lesser of the fair market value of the property, or \$2,500, or by the student's assignment to a school work project, or both.

E. Corporal Punishment. Corporal punishment may not be used to discipline a student in a public school in the State.

*F. Minimum Education Services*

*(1) In order to establish accountability and to keep suspended or expelled students on track with classroom work, each local board shall institute education services that at minimum provide that:*

*(a) Each student suspended or expelled out-of-school who is not placed in an alternative education program shall receive daily classwork and assignments from each teacher which shall be reviewed and corrected by teachers on a weekly basis and returned to the student.*

*(b) Each principal shall assign a school staff person to be the liaison between the teachers and the various students on out-of-school suspension or expulsion and to communicate weekly about classwork assignments and school-related issues by phone or e-mail with those out-of-school suspended/expelled students and their parents.*

**.12 Arrests on School Premises.**

A. When possible and appropriate, arrest by police should be made during nonschool hours and away from the school premises.

B. When an arrest on school premises during the school hours is necessary, the responsible school official shall ascertain the facts from the arresting officer which will enable the school official to fully advise the parent or guardians and other school officials of the nature of the charge, the identity of the arresting officer, and the location of the student.

C. When an arrest has taken place on school premises or during school hours, every effort shall be made by school officials to inform the parent or guardians immediately and thereafter promptly to advise the local superintendent of schools.

D. Arrest on school premises during school hours shall be effectuated in such a manner as to avoid both embarrassment to the student being arrested and jeopardizing the safety and welfare of other students.

E. School officials may not permit questioning of a student under arrest on the school premises and shall request the arresting officer to remove the student from the premises as soon as practicable after the arrest is made.

*F. Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, data on school arrests shall be reported in a manner and format developed by the Department and approved by the State Board.*

**.12-1 Bringing or Possessing a Firearm on School Property.**

A. In this regulation, the following terms have the meanings indicated:

(1) "Alternative educational setting" means an alternative education program that allows the student to continue the student's education within the public school system and, if in a secondary school, the opportunity to earn credit.

(2) "Expulsion" means at a minimum the removal of a student from the student's regular school program.

(3) "Firearm" means a weapon as defined in 18 U.S.C. §921.

(4) "School property" means buildings, land that surrounds the buildings, and vehicles, that are owned or leased by a local school system.

(5) "Year" means a calendar year of 12 months.

B. General Provisions.

(1) Except as provided in §B(2) of this regulation, if the local superintendent or designee finds that a student has brought a firearm onto school property or to a school-sponsored activity or has possessed a firearm on school property or at a school-sponsored activity, the student shall be expelled for a minimum of 1 year.

(2) The local superintendent may specify in writing, on a case-by-case basis, a shorter period of expulsion or an alternative educational setting, if alternative educational settings have been approved by the local board, for a student who has brought a firearm onto school property or to a school-sponsored activity or has possessed a firearm on school property or at a school-sponsored activity.

(3) Nothing in this regulation applies to a firearm:

- (a) That is lawfully stored inside a locked vehicle on school property; or
- (b) For activities approved and authorized by the local school system, if the local school system adopts appropriate safeguards to ensure student safety.

C. Students with Disabilities. An identified student with disabilities who brings a firearm onto school property or to a school-sponsored activity or who possesses a firearm on school property or at a school-sponsored activity may be suspended or expelled in accordance with the procedures set out in Education Article, §7-305, Annotated Code of Maryland, and COMAR 13A.08.03.

D. Administrative Procedures.

(1) Annually by August 1, each local school system shall provide the State Board of Education with a report that includes:

- (a) Written certification that the local school system is in compliance with the requirements of this regulation;
- (b) A description of the circumstances surrounding any expulsions imposed under State law as required by §B(1) of this regulation;
- (c) The number of incidents in which a student brought a firearm onto school property or to a school-sponsored activity or possessed a firearm on school property or at a school-sponsored activity;
- (d) The name of the school where each incident took place;
- (e) The type of firearm involved;
- (f) The disposition of each case, including the number of students:
  - (i) Expelled from each school, and
  - (ii) Placed in alternative educational settings; and
- (g) A description of alternative educational settings used in compliance with this regulation.

(2) Each local school system shall report each incident in which a student brings a firearm onto school property or to a school-sponsored activity or possesses a firearm on school property or at a school-sponsored activity to the appropriate juvenile justice or criminal enforcement agency.

E. Nothing in this regulation precludes a local school system from developing or applying more stringent regulations and procedures.

...

## **.15 Reporting Delinquent Acts.**

A. Delinquent acts are offenses committed by a person who is under 18 years old which would be crimes if committed by an adult. School officials shall promptly report to the

responsible law enforcement agencies all delinquent acts coming to their attention whether occurring on or away from the school premises which involve students attending the particular school.

B. Delinquent acts do not include conduct which has been traditionally treated as a matter of discipline to be handled administratively by the particular school, except that all conduct of a serious nature should be promptly reported to the parent or guardians concerned.

C. *Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, the local school systems shall report data to the Department on school arrests and referrals to law enforcement agencies or to the juvenile justice system in a form and manner developed by the Department and approved by the State Board.*

...

#### ***.21 Reducing and Eliminating Disproportionate/Discrepant Impact***

A. *The Department shall develop a method to analyze local school system discipline data to determine whether there is a disproportionate impact on minority students.*

B. *The Department may use the discrepancy model to assess the impact of discipline on special education students.*

C. *If the Department identifies a school's discipline process as having a disproportionate impact on minority students or a discrepant impact on special education students, the local school system shall prepare and present to the State Board a plan to reduce the impact within 1 year and eliminate it within 3 years.*

D. *The local school system will report its progress annually to the State Board.*

#### **IV. Discipline Imposed Well and Appropriately Is One of The Tools Schools Can Use to Teach Students How to Succeed.**

We recognize that changing regulations is but one step in reforming school discipline policies. The changes that are necessary must occur in the local school systems - - with local board, administrators, teachers, school resources officers, students, and parents. We recognize that we are not the ones who can decide when to impose discipline and what that discipline should be. What we can do is set the stage on which that type of decision-making occurs wisely and well. We expect, therefore, that:

- All schools in Maryland will recognize that their mission is, in part, to have a disciplined and consistent way to identify what constitutes behavior that warrants disciplinary intervention and to develop effective approaches that maximize the opportunities to keep students on the path toward educational success.
- All school systems will reduce the number of students who drop-out of school because, through multiple or long-term suspensions, they have gotten the message

– “You don’t want me around.” We have a new message: “We can only succeed if we have everybody with us.”

Those goals reflect our basic philosophy that the purpose of school discipline is a rehabilitative one.

We know that many schools in Maryland already recognize those goals and have programs in place to achieve those goals. Because we could not address every program in this Report, we asked that the State Superintendent establish a School Discipline Best Practices Workgroup to explore ways to bring such programs to all schools.

We end our Report by acknowledging that every member of the education community can be and needs to be involved in school discipline reform. We advocate training for all educators in approaches to class room management, cultural competency, character education, PBIS or other like programs - - training focused on how wise and effective school discipline is connected to academic achievement, keeping students engaged and in school, and graduating student college and career ready. We urge the School Discipline Best Practices Workgroup to provide information to us, to Maryland educators, particularly to superintendents and principals, on programs that work and can be implemented even with limited resources.

We encourage that Workgroup to look at whether training programs for school resource officers are necessary, given the reforms that will be implemented.

For parents, we ask that you take up the school discipline reform mantra to help your children stay in school, learn positive behaviors, and graduate college and career ready.

And to the students in Maryland public schools, we know that it is also up to you to work hard, stay in school, and take a good look at how you behave there. It is your responsibility, too, to engage in this school discipline reform effort.

Although this Report concludes our current study of school discipline in Maryland, it does not end our interest in the topic. We intend to monitor discipline data in the upcoming years to spotlight continuing problems. As we have said throughout this Report, school discipline policies are linked to student achievement and to the achievement gap. School discipline reform is connected to our education reform efforts. We will work in the next year to more fully implement that connection so that our vision of a world class education system preparing all students for college and career success in a safe, healthy, and orderly school comes to fruition.

# **APPENDIX A**

## **Contributors, Panels, Presenters, and Commenters**

Over the course of our two year study we heard from hundreds of educators, parents, and students. Some of the panels and presenters were:

### **Local School Systems and Local Boards**

Carl Roberts, Executive Director  
Public School Superintendents  
Association of Maryland

Gene Streagle  
Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals

Thomas Carr, President  
Maryland Association of Boards of Education

Rochelle Eisenberg  
Maryland Council of School Attorneys

Baltimore County Public Schools  
Montgomery County Public Schools  
Allegany County Public Schools  
Calvert County Public Schools  
Charles County Public Schools

Kent County Public Schools  
Cecil County Public Schools  
Frederick County Public Schools  
Baltimore City Public Schools

### **Advocates**

American Civil Liberties Union  
Legal Aid  
Open Society  
Maryland Disability Law Center  
Office of the Public Defender (Montgomery County)  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

### **Parents and Students**

Maryland Foster Parents Association  
Maryland Congress of Parents and Teachers  
Maryland Association of Student Councils  
Maryland PTA  
Nina Marks, Student Member of the State Board on behalf of one of her fellow students

### **Teachers**

Michelle Shearer, National Teacher of the Year 2010  
Joshua Parker, Maryland Teacher of the Year 2011  
Marietta English, President Baltimore Teacher's Union  
Clara Floyd, President, Maryland State Education Association

### **Maryland State Department of Education**

Ann Chafin , Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Student, Family, and School Support  
Chuck Buckler, Director, Student Services and Alternative Programs Branch, Division of Student, Family, and School Support  
Robert Murphy, Specialist, School Completion and Alternative Programs, School Health Issues  
Division of Student, Family, and School Support

We also received hundreds of comments on the draft Report. We heard from:

Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Carroll County Public School - Steven M. Johnson

Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP)

Education Reform Project, American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland -Bebe Verdery Director

Advocates for Children and Youth - Rebecca Wagner, Executive Director and David S. Beard,  
Education Policy

Montgomery County Public Schools - Dr. Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

Calvert County Board of Education

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund - Advancement Project, American Civil Liberties  
Union, Dignity in Schools Coalition

Calvert County Public Schools - Dr. Jack R. Smith Superintendent of Schools

Maryland Disability Law Center - Nicole Joseph, Esq. and Alyssa Fieo, Director of Legal  
Advocacy

Circle of Restorative Initiatives for Maryland (CRI) - Jennifer Langdon, Chair and Timothy J.  
Johnson, Founding Member

Gale and Kathy Heslop; Ann and Phil Miller; Donna and Barry Coelangelo; Ed and Nancy  
Underriner; Chris and Diane Jacob; Bob and Christina Jedlaneki; and Alisha Mahaffey

Montgomery County NAACP Parents' Council - Byron Johns, Parents' Council Chair

Baltimore Algebra Project - Jay Gillen and Maryland Shaw; Community Conferencing - Lauren  
Abramson ; GLSEN - Kay Halle ; Safe and Sound - Hathaway Ferebee; Big Brothers Big Sisters  
of the Greater Chesapeake - Selwyn Ray; CityWide - Sandra Spears; East Baltimore Youth and  
Family Services - Maceo Hallman; and Maryland Out of School Network- Ellie Mitchell

Maura Taylor

Prince George's County Public Schools - Verjeana M. Jacobs, Esq., Board Chair and Dr.  
William R. Hite, Superintendent

Community Conferencing Center - Lauren Abramson, Ph.D, Executive Director

Baltimore County Public Schools Office of Law - Margaret-Ann F. Howie, General Counsel; J.  
Stephen Cowles, Associate General Counsel, Special Education Compliance; and Anjanette L.  
Dixon, Associate General Counsel, Educational Support Services

Baltimore County Public Schools - Dale R. Rauenzahn, Executive Director, Department of Student Support Services; Patsy J. Holmes, Student Handbook Committee; and Glenda Myrick, Coordinator, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Co-chairperson Student Handbook Committee

Campaign for Black Male Achievement - Shawn Dove, Manager; U.S. Programs, Open Society Foundations; Education and Youth Development Program, Open Society Institute – Baltimore - Jane Sundius, Ph.D, Director; and Education and Youth Development Program, Open Society Institute – Baltimore - Katherine Rabb, JD, Research Associate

Board of Education of Garrett County - Phillip E. Lauver, Ed.D., Supervisor of Pupil Services

Maryland State Education Association (MSEA)

The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) - Laurie Halverson, Vice President, Educational Issues

Dorchester County Board of Education - Jim Bishop, President (Speaking as an individual)

Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals - Debra Mugge, Ed.D., President

Office of the Public Defender, Rockville, MD - Jennifer Barmon, Assistant Public Defender

Baltimore City Public Schools - Dr. Andres A. Alonso, Ed.D., CEO

Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland - Carl D. Roberts, Ed.D., Executive Director

Board of Education of Howard County - Sandra H. French, Chairman

Carroll County - Robert Cullison, Principal

Dulaney High School - Dr. John Murdock, Physics Teacher

Lansdowne Middle School - Sharon Schneck, Special Educator

Woodlawn Middle School - John Schwartz, Teacher

Shady Spring Elementary - Wendy G. Carver, LCPC, NCC, NCSC, Professional School Counselor

Calvert High School - Susan B. Johnson, Principal

Quince Orchard High School - Christy Freeland, PTSA President

MD Association Pupil Personnel - Carla S. Diffenderfer, M.Ed., Vice-President

Washington County Public Schools  
Charles County - Trisha A. Heard, First Grade Teacher

DES PTA President

Shady Spring Elementary School – Wendy G. Carver, LCPC, NCCC, NCSC, Professional  
School Counselor

Calvert High School – Joe Sutton

General John Stricker Middle School – Deborah Leimbach, Math Chair

Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals

Montgomery County PTA

Maryland State Education Association (MSEA)

Baltimore County Public Schools – Dale R. Rauenzahn, Executive Director, Department of  
Student Services; Patsy J. Holmes, Director and Co-chairperson Student Handbook Committee;  
and Glenda Myrick, Coordinator, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Co-chairperson, Student  
Handbook Committee

Ann Wilson

Colonel Richardson High School – Kim Leverage, Positive Behavior Strategies Committee

John W. Robinson

Ron Stairs

Shirley Marshall

Randolph Brown

Flemming Paschal

Beth and Frank Strakonsky

Michael Bartek

Bill Lindsay

Baltimore County Public Schools – Linda Sather, Paraeducator

Mill Creek Middle School, Calvert County – Sharon Volack

Colonel Richardson High School – Rhiannon Burkett

Calvert County Public Schools – Sylvia Lawson

Jean Claude Zenklusen

Naghma Husain

Baltimore County Public Schools – Courtney Croxton, Music Teacher

Calvert High School – Donna Tizol

David O’Neill

Calvert High School – Samuel G. Oliver, Special Education Teacher

Susan Nerlinger

[Wendjaz@aol.com](mailto:Wendjaz@aol.com)

Hanna Hutchinson

Dawn Hauer

Colonel Richardson High School – Bernadette France, Lead Mathematics Teacher/Teacher Academy Instructor

John Elligers

CRHS – Matt Breedlove, Math Teacher

Gale and Kathy Heslop; Ann and Phil Miller; Donna and Barry Coelangelo; Ed and Nancy Underriner; Chris and Diane Jacob; Bob and Christina Jedlanek; and Alisha Mahaffey

Sharon L. Robertson

Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) – Gary W. Bauer, President

Erin Wilson

Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Business Services – Brian M. Knight

[mommyjoan05@aol.com](mailto:mommyjoan05@aol.com)

Barbara Orcutt-Vrable

David G. O’Neill

Northwestern High School Assistant Principal - Douglass Jones

Craig Cummings, Ed.D.

Joshua Ederheimer

Cynthia Grove

Shelley Lombardo

Pepper Bowins

Holly Furdyna

Caitlin McLaughlin

Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center – Ellen O’Neill, Executive Director

Stefani Shuster

Mutual Elementary - Beth Beighley

Washington County Public Schools – Mike Markoe, Assistant Superintendent for Student and Staff Support

[asmith20@comcast.net](mailto:asmith20@comcast.net)

Woodlawn Middle School – April C. Jones, Principal

Activists with a Purpose; African-American Male Achievement Incorporated (AMA); Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law; Community Asset Development Re-defining Education (CADRE); Community Justice for Youth Institute; Center for Community Alternatives; Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School; Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM); Education Law Center (New Jersey); Families Against Restraint and Seclusion; Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network of Baltimore; Gwinnett STOPP; Health & Medicine Policy Research Group (IL); Illinois Safe Schools Alliance; International Community Corrections Association; Justice Policy Institute; National Women’s Law Center; Nollie Jenkins Family Center, Inc.; Restorative Schools Vision Project; South Carolina Applesed Legal Justice Center; Southern Disability Law Center; Southern Poverty Law Center; and TASH: Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities Since 1975

FreeState Legal Project – Lee Ann Hopkins, Esq.

Susan Bryne

Joe Scott

# **APPENDIX B**

## **DISCIPLINE IS ALWAYS TEACHING: EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVES TO ZERO TOLERANCE IN SCHOOLS [5226]**

Russell J. Skiba  
M. Karega Rausch  
Shana Ritter

Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University

### **Abstract**

While some schools continue to rely on exclusionary discipline for maintaining school safety, others have begun to explore preventive alternatives. This session will describe the results of interviews with principals from one Midwestern state who describe their attempts to maintain school safety and academic integrity without emphasizing suspension and expulsion.

### **Introduction**

In the face of multiple victim homicides in the late 1990's, schools have been increasingly motivated to address issues of disruption and violence. Pressure from teachers concerned about the safety of their classrooms (Public Agenda, 2004) and from parents who wish to ensure school safety (Pew Research Center, 2000) motivate schools and communities to search for methods that can promote safe school climates maximally conducive to learning.

The climate of fear that has prevailed in recent years has also generated support for more punitive methods of school discipline, often under the broad rhetoric of *zero tolerance* (Noguera, 1995). Such policies assume that by removing disruptive students from the school environment, school will be safer and more effective for those remaining.

Available evidence suggests, however, that zero tolerance has not met its goal of maintaining safety, and has been associated with a number of unintended consequences for students. Current evidence suggests that zero tolerance school discipline is associated with a number of negative schooling outcomes, including lower achievement (Rausch, Skiba, and Simmons, 2005), higher rates of dropout (Bowditch, 1993), a more punitive schooling environment (Bickel and Qualls, 1980), and high rates of recidivism (Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin, 1996). Further, emerging evidence suggests that zero tolerance strengthens a school-to-prison pipeline by criminalizing student misbehavior that would normally have been addressed by school officials (Advancement Project, 2005; Wald and Losen, 2003). Finally, students of color are disproportionately affected by zero tolerance, without any evidence of higher rates of misbehavior within these populations (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson, 2002).

A common misconception held by some educators and policymakers is that there are virtually no alternatives to school removal for maintaining safe schools. Evidence-based research and federal panels have identified programs that are clearly effective in reducing the threat of violence and disruption without removing large numbers of students from the learning environment (Dwyer, Osher, and Warger, 1998; Elliott, Hatot, Sirovatka, and Potter, 2001; Gagnon and Leone, 2001; Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, Fagan, and Hansen, 2001; Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, and Baer, 2000).

The identification of an effective or promising approach in research does not, however, guarantee that it will be effectively implemented used at the local level. There is some evidence suggesting that the implementation of prevention activities is typically at a level that would be considered unacceptable for

guaranteeing efficacy (Gottfredson et al., 2000). A program may have been tested under conditions very different from those faced by local students and educators, or found to be effective only with resources unavailable to local schools (Gottfredson, 2001; Schoenwald and Hoagwood, 2001). Thus, it is extremely important to explore the options that currently exist and are being used in local schools. The purpose of this paper is to describe strategies, programs, and interventions currently in use in school settings as alternatives to suspension and expulsion. We will describe the results of qualitative interviews with principals in one Midwestern state who report using a variety of comprehensive and preventive approaches for promoting safe and productive school climates without reducing student opportunity to learn.

## **Method**

Principals participating in the study were solicited through the state association of school principals, and volunteered to share information about programs in their schools that they feel are effective in maintaining a safe and productive learning climate. Protocols were developed and used querying the following areas: (1) philosophy/program description (e.g. what is the school's disciplinary philosophy, who does the program serve, where is it located etc.), (2) structure (e.g. what methods are used to prevent violence and disruption from occurring or intervene when they do occur), and (3) outcomes (e.g. how have students and staff responded to this philosophy/program).

Telephone interviews were conducted with nine principals and one high school assistant principal responsible for discipline. Interviews lasted approximately 1 ½ hours in duration. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Transcribed interview data were analyzed for trends and themes (Silverman, 2000; Yin, 2003) specific to programs, practices and perspectives that participants reported using to maintain safe and productive schools. Three researchers analyzed the data independently and then came to a consensus on the most relevant, recurring, and informative themes and trends.

The administrators who were interviewed served many different types of schools. Four were elementary school principals (K-5) and the remaining six were secondary school principals (4 middle schools and 2 high school). Four schools had federally subsidized lunch rates at or above 30 percent. While most schools served a predominately white student population, two schools had minority student populations above 25 percent. Four schools served suburban communities, three urban, and three rural.

## **Results**

Across the conversations with principals about the work they do to maintain a school climate conducive to learning, a number of common themes emerged:

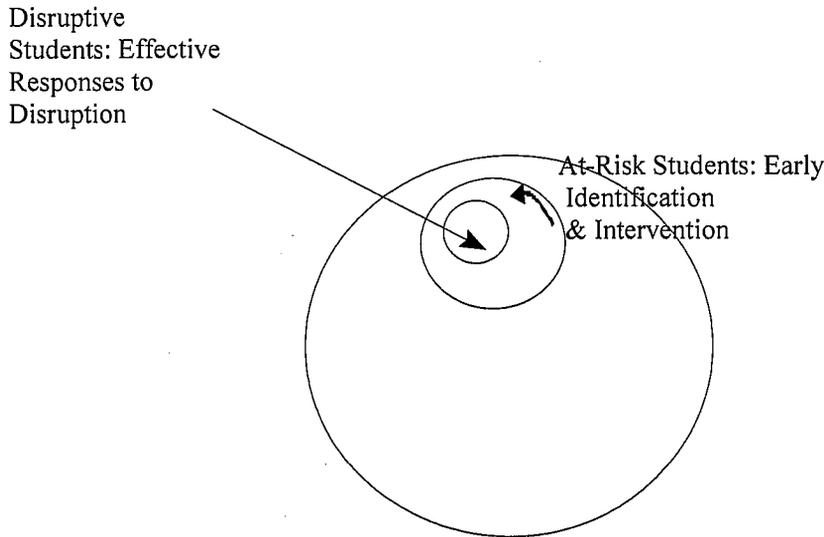
**Proactive Intervention:** These principals made it clear that they do not simply sit back and wait to react to disruptions. Instead, these instructional leaders are strongly proactive, supporting practices and programs that reduce the likelihood of aggression or violence, and making discipline a shared responsibility of students, parents, teachers and administrators.

**Building Connections with Students.** These principals emphasize connectedness—building and strengthening connections with at-risk students and their parents.

**Creative Options for More Serious Infractions.** The principals we spoke with made it clear that their schools were by no means immune from serious infractions. Yet they also worked to develop a variety of creative options for dealing with even the most extreme behavior.

These responses appear to mirror a three-tiered model of violence prevention that has gained widespread support as a valuable guide for organizing school discipline and school climate efforts (American Psychological Association, 1993; Dwyer, Osher, and Warger, 1998; Walker et al., 1996). Figure 1 presents one descriptive violence prevention model, drawn from the Safe and Responsive Schools Project (Skiba, Peterson, Miller, Ritter, and Simmons, in press), around which the comments from the principals will be organized.

Figure 1. A three-tiered model of school discipline and violence prevention (Skiba et al., in press).



At the first level, all students benefit from primary prevention efforts to create a positive climate and teach appropriate conflict resolution and problem solving skills. Within the larger student body is a subset of students at risk for disruption who will likely benefit from early identification and efforts to re-engage them in school. Finally, although the third group of the most challenging students is smallest, it is important to have effective plans to minimize the impact of school disruption.

### **Creating a Safe and Responsive School Climate**

The principals who were interviewed described philosophies and strategies that helped them better teach students what is expected of them in school. As one principal of an elementary school in an urban area put it, "Discipline is always teaching." These programs fell into two categories: *school-wide preventive programming* and school discipline as instruction

#### **School-Wide Preventive Programs**

All of the principals highlighted the importance of a welcoming climate and teaching students appropriate social skills. Said one, "If you can create a culture where kids feel respected and safe and secure then we can get to the nuts and bolts of teaching these kids." Two principals mentioned participation in the state's CLASS program (Connecting Learning Assures Successful Schools), a curriculum philosophy and model designed to enhance teaching and learning through effective classroom management, comprehensive literacy development, and character education among other elements. One principal described the Lifeskills approach

used in that program:

There are seventeen or so character values. Respect, cooperation, honesty, perseverance, caring, courage ... our staff members have embraced them and you see them everywhere. The teachers take time to talk about those life skills... and begin to embed them into their curriculum ... What you end up having are kids who are very respectful to one another, and who are willing to work cooperatively.

At the elementary level, one principal described participation in another state program, Project PEACE, teaching students conflict resolution and peer mediation skills:

Students learn to mediate difficulties within the school... We've taken it to the point that there are peace spots in every room and there's a poster in my office. They click right into it. They won't appeal to me every time. They know to look at one another. It's amazing what the training does.

Many schools have begun to implement comprehensive bullying prevention programs. One rural elementary school principal describes this model in her school:

Our elementary school began the No Bullying Program in 2000. Often, people are surprised at what bullying is, they don't recognize a lot of behavior as bullying. The program has given us a common language where everyone knows what bullying is. Our office referral forms were developed to match the No Bullying chart that every teacher and every student sees all over the school, and we send it home to parents, too. I will take this program with me wherever I go because it works.

At the high school level, one administrator described a student organization called the Stand Up Committee, trying to address the drug and alcohol issues that plague many high schools:

STAND UP is Students Taking A Non-Destructive Upward Pathway ... to try and impress upon their peers that there are a lot of things that you can do on the weekends other than the destructive behaviors that happen. It culminated during the half time of a basketball game and we asked all the students that would like to make a commitment ... And I know a lot of them came forward that probably aren't going to hold to that commitment, but it's at least planting the seed.

### School Discipline as Instruction and Organization

Principals stressed the importance of promoting a common understanding among staff, students, parents, and administrators of how discipline works at their schools. These principals work closely with their teachers to define what are the most appropriate referrals to the office, and which are better handled at the classroom level.

We went through some scenarios. For example, a child taking a pencil away from another child—that should never come to the office. A child who intentionally is trying to hurt another child—that directly comes to the office ... My philosophy has always been you settle it at the lowest level.

Principals suggested that this approach actually gives teachers more authority in their classrooms:

Once you send a child to the office, as a classroom teacher you give up a part of your control over that child... So I think as a school we've come to realize that it's a lot better to handle the discipline within the team [of teachers] if we can because that sends a message to the student that the team has control.

Such an approach also frees up administrator time, noted the principals, from having to deal with an endless

stream of referrals to more time for counseling students or meeting for planning with teacher teams.

These schools also reported involving parents throughout the disciplinary process. At a number of schools, teachers contact parents before any referral to the office is made. In one school, parents are actively encouraged to support the school's disciplinary code early in the year:

At the beginning of the year I had the child sign [the code of conduct card] and I had the parents sign it... at our back-to-school meeting, I shared with the parents that I was asking for their support.

As a result of such communication, parents tend to be more supportive of school disciplinary actions, as this urban elementary school principal notes:

I have very few parents who get upset with me because a lot of times we've done a lot of interventions ... There are no surprises. And I have to think the parents appreciate that because they've been part of it through the entire process

### **Early Identification and Early Intervention**

School alienation has been found to be a risk factor for both juvenile delinquency (Elliot, Hamburg, and Williams, 1998) and deadly school violence (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski, 2002). Principals who were interviewed identified a number of ways they tried to re-connect at-risk students and their parents.

### **The Importance of Communication and Caring**

For those students whose behavior indicates a higher risk for disruption, these principals suggested that they worked hard to establish communication with both students and parents. One high school administrator noted:

We're very hands-on administrators. I think that the students feel like they can come to us at any time and work with us. We go to a lot of student activities, a lot more than I know most administrators do, just trying to be present and let the students know that we really do care and we try to work with them. That's not a program, that's just kind of a philosophy that we have.

At one elementary school, the principal emphasized that the level of communication extends to parents as well:

Communication is really stressed: We're increasing email, ... newsletters, chatting, we have input forms [from parents]. I think it's part of the culture of the building.

As a result, these administrators believe that students are more willing to communicate potential problems to staff and administrators in the building. An assistant principal in a suburban high school described the school's attempts to keep channels of communication open:

Every time he [the principal] has the student body together he reminds them that if there is anything out there that's lingering and dangerous to make sure that you bring it forward. He is just continually impressing upon the kids how important communication is.

Trust of administrators proved critical in this building: when a student approached the administration to report a student with a cache of weapons, administrators and local police were able to take preventive action that

headed off a potentially deadly situation (The Herald Times, 2001).

Some schools have created schools within a school or blocks in an attempt to better connect with students. At one middle school, common planning times for teachers allow the school to re-organize itself into teams that function as a school within a school—students primarily see teachers within their team, allowing students and teachers to establish a closer bond. Each team has its own goals, vision, and mission statement, and the effects on discipline are apparent to the principal:

So yes they meet every day. The kids know they do. I mean it's no longer, [that] they can snow one teacher and another one wouldn't be aware of it.

### **Programs for Connection: Early Identification, Mentoring, and Academic Issues**

Some schools have also implemented programs to help identify those children most at risk for violence and disruption, and to provide assistance to those students to re-connect them with school. One principal at an elementary school with an economically disadvantaged population described how her school uses an early screening process based on the Systematic Screening for Behavioral Disorders system (Walker and Severson, 1990) and bi-weekly staffing meetings to identify and provide assistance for those children who are most at risk for disruption and school failure.

We look to intervene early if we see some things that are developing. We worked really hard helping teachers identify internalizers as well as externalizers... We do staffings around those kids. This isn't a way of identifying a student. It's more like trying to predict the problem and prevent it.

Mentoring programs, such as the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program have been identified as among the most effective programs for reducing the risk of violence (Mihalic et al., 2001). At one urban elementary school, every adult from administrators to teachers to custodial staff was asked to mentor one child who had been identified as someone "who we considered to be disconnected from school."

And all we asked was that the adults would meet with these kids once a week ... I would have lunch with this child and we would play chess and we would talk ... We saw that we were making progress with these kids because really a lot of these kids didn't have anyone who really took an interest in them.

Many of the principals remarked on the relationship for many students between risk for academic failure and risk for acting-out behavior. One administrator in a suburban high school described the relationship between academic problems and behavioral problems this way:

Some behavioral problems are due to [a student's] feeling inadequate in the classroom or feeling as if they can't perform academically—"I'd rather be bad than dumb." That [understanding] has really helped us a lot...we have alleviated that problem by trying to keep kids from feeling that way in whatever setting they are in.

In one rural middle school, the alternative school mixes a focus on academics for students who are struggling with a focus on teaching students appropriate social skills. Says the principal of this program:

Right now we're piloting a program with [a local university] and their social sciences program where student counselors come in with that [alternative school] group and work with them in terms of conflict resolution, problem solving, getting along with others...that's been a very good experience this year and the counselors want to continue it next year.

## **Effective Responses to School Disruption or Crisis**

Unless the school carefully plans its response in advance, the extreme behavior of even a handful of students can seriously interfere with the learning climate. In their efforts to protect their schools from disorder while maximizing student opportunity to remain in school, these principals described a variety of creative alternatives to traditional out-of-school suspension and expulsion.

### **A New Perspective: From Zero Tolerance to Graduated Discipline**

By no means were the principals we talked with inclined to in any way relax their expectations for appropriate behavior. Suspension and expulsion were by no means ruled out as an option for seriously disruptive behavior.

We will not put up with misbehavior. ... You are here to learn and we're going to do everything we can to provide the proper education. Your teachers are here to work with you. We're doing everything we can to support you but then again we will not deal with any misbehaviors. That's the bottom line. If you hit somebody, you're going to be suspended.

Yet the principals we interviewed also typically rejected a one-size-fits all disciplinary approach. As one elementary school principal noted:

We don't have a zero tolerance policy ... In the office we really seek to understand what's going on and have consequences that make sense. [We] try not to use out-of-school suspensions unless we're at our wits' end. We want them here at school.

Trying to achieve this balance seems to lead these principals to an approach wherein the severity of punishment is more likely tailored to fit the seriousness of the infraction. Said one principal:

Just to have a standard, people say 'Well, okay, you lose a recess no matter what the infraction is.' But let's say they have written on a wall in the bathroom. I think they should put on gloves and clean it off. That makes sense.

### **Creative Modifications to Suspension and Expulsion**

Perhaps most striking at this level were the creative ways in which these schools modified the traditional notions of out-of-school suspension and expulsion so as to send a strong disciplinary message to students without reducing (and perhaps even increasing) their time in school. In one high school, in place of an out-of-school suspension, students' parents are asked to come in to school and follow their son or daughter around for a day:

We will offer them [parents] the opportunity to sit in class with them. They can go through the day with the student and basically keep them [in line] with their behavior and also do some observation. Sometimes it's been a real eye-opener for the parents... Kids don't like it you know.

A middle school principal in a rural area described her school's extended day program organized in conjunction with the local court system. When students are "suspended" into this program, they are not removed from school; rather, they are brought to school by their parents at 6 a.m. and go to school until 6 p.m. that evening, and are monitored closely by two trained supervisors.

One comes in from 6 to 2 and the other from 10 to 6 and then in that cross between it gives them some

time also to meet with the student if necessary, or go to a class with the student [that he or she is] having particular trouble in ... These students also have two counseling components a week from local counseling providers that we have here in our community and this is done on their own. ... The program has been very successful. Our suspension rate the first year we implemented it dropped 50 percent.

Some schools have even found ways to modify expulsion so that it does not end a student's contact with school. One high school uses what they term "probationary expulsion" for non-dangerous offenses:

We absolutely do not believe in zero tolerance policies... If we're going to expel a student, probably 90 percent of the time we will expel him or her technically but we allow the student to return to school on what's called a continuing education agreement... What we're trying to do is make a commitment to try to help kids, to allow them, even though they've made a pretty major mistake, for example possession of drugs or alcohol,... to return to school on a probationary basis. It is very proactive because for the student's benefit we require drug testing and counseling as a part of that.

The principals we spoke with reported that this combination of high expectations and support for students can be effective even for the toughest kids. As one high school disciplinarian noted:

We've had several really tough kids enter this school and after going through and being surrounded by kids who have embraced the class and the culture of the school they've turned it around. We're not seeing that aggressive behavior. Because they know this is a nurturing place. That the teachers care about them as individuals. Other classmates care about them...that has helped eliminate many of the problems.

## **Conclusion**

Every day, principals are faced with the complex job of bringing hundreds of students from widely varying backgrounds together and ensuring that they can focus on their schoolwork, not disruptions. The principals described in this paper have sought and found methods that allow them to preserve the safety and integrity of the learning climate in their schools while maximizing student opportunity to learn.

We found no hint of compromise in the approach described by these principals. There was no question that they maintained high expectations for both student behavior and academic achievement, and they were not afraid to remove a student if school safety demanded. But the principals we spoke with reported that they use a wide variety of strategies to ensure that suspension and expulsion are not the only tools for maintaining a safe and effective learning environment. These principals reported efforts to clarify classroom management expectations with staff to ensure that office referrals are not overused. These schools actively seek to teach students alternatives to disruption and misbehavior through school philosophy and preventive programs. School staff at these schools communicate and collaborate with students and parents, and that effort seems to be rewarded by a higher level of cooperation with school disciplinary actions. These administrators look for ways to re-connect those students who are in danger of becoming alienated from schooling. And they refuse to give up on even the most challenging of students, developing creative alternatives to traditional suspension and expulsion that make a strong statement to disruptive students without depriving those students of an opportunity to an education.

It should not be assumed that, because these schools rely upon their own creativity to develop effective options, the development of effective disciplinary systems is resource-free. Many of the principals spoke of the need for additional resources to support programs that could be implemented only minimally or to begin new programs:

We've done a lot of good on very, very few resources. However, it's taxing and we're spread too thin ... Really, we need money to bring in more quality educated people who can work with these kids to minimize ratios and maximize the impact of a good adult role model.

Others emphasized the need for state support for both in-school prevention and for alternative programs for students who are removed from school.

One federally funded initiative, the *Safe and Responsive Schools Project*, provided a demonstration that increased options can maintain school safety even while reducing exclusionary discipline (Skiba et al., in press). Six schools in three urban, suburban, and rural districts developed school teams that identified their greatest safety needs. As part of a strategic planning process, those teams tailored school safety plans to meet those needs. The project director, in testimony before the U.S. House Education Reform Committee, presented evidence of dramatic reductions in suspension, expulsion, and even school dropout among participating schools (U.S. House of Representatives, 2002). Like the principals described herein, those schools demonstrated that with increased options for addressing school disruption and school climate, there can be another way in school discipline.

In sum then, the principals described in this paper have sought and found methods that allow them to preserve the safety and integrity of the learning climate in their schools without removing large numbers of students from the learning environment. Their perspectives, programs and practices serve as models for school and community leaders interested in ensuring safe and effective schools for all students. As our knowledge of available options for promoting a safe and effective school climate increases, it becomes apparent that there is no contradiction between the need to keep schools safe and the mandate to maximize educational opportunity for all children. The perspectives, programs and practices of these principals serve as models for school and community leaders interested in ensuring safe and effective schools for all students.

## References

- Advancement Project (2005). *Education on lockdown: The schoolhouse to jailhouse track*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- American Psychological Association (1993). *Violence and youth: Psychology's response*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Bickel, F., and Qualls, R. (1980). The impact of school climate on suspension rates in the Jefferson County Public Schools. *Urban Review*, 12, 79-86.
- Bowditch, C. (1993). Getting rid of troublemakers: High school disciplinary procedures and the production of dropouts. *Social Problems*, 40, 493-507.
- Dwyer, K., Osher, D., and Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education
- Elliott, D.S., Hamburg, B.A., and Williams, K.R. (1998). *Violence in American schools*. Cambridge University Press.
- Elliott, D., Hatot, N.J., Sirovatka, P., and Potter, B.B. (2001). *Youth violence: A report of the Surgeon General*. Washington, DC: U.S. Surgeon General.
- Gagnon, J.C., and Leone, P.E. (2001). Alternative strategies for youth violence prevention. In R.J. Skiba and G.G. Noam (Eds.), *New Directions for Youth Development* (no. 92; Zero tolerance: Can suspension and expulsion keep school safe?), (pp. 101-125). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gottfredson, D.C. (2001). *Delinquency prevention in schools*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gottfredson, G.D., Gottfredson, D.C., Czeh, E.R., Cantor, D., Crosse, S., and Hantman, I. (2000). *The national study of delinquency prevention in schools*. Ellicott City, MD: Gottfredson Associates.
- The Herald Times (2001, December 12). Report of gun threat nets arrest of boy, 15. *The Herald Times*, Bloomington, IN.
- Mihalic, S., Irwin, K., Elliott, D., Fagan, A., and Hansen, D. (2001, July). *Blueprints for violence prevention* (OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Noguera, P.A. (1995). Preventing and producing violence: A critical analysis of responses to school violence. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65, 189-212.
- Pew Research Center (2000). *A year after Columbine: Public looks to parents more than schools to prevent violence*.

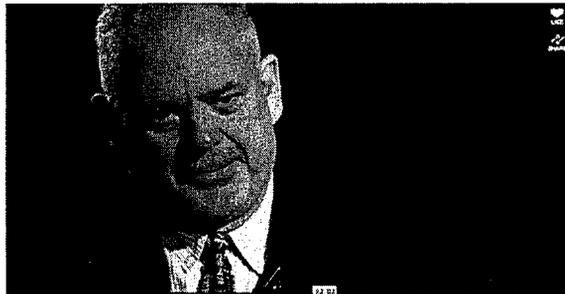
- [Online]. Retrieved July 21, 2004 from <http://people-press.org>
- Public Agenda. (2004). *Teaching interrupted: Do discipline policies in today's public schools foster the common good?* [Online]. Retrieved July 21, 2004 from <http://www.publicagenda.org> .
- Rausch, M.K., Skiba, R.J., and Simmons, A.B. (2005, April). *The academic cost of discipline: School disciplines contribution to achievement*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, Montreal, Canada
- Schoenwald, S.K., and Hoagwood, K. (2001). Effectiveness, transportability, and dissemination of intervention: What matters when? *Psychiatric Services*, 52, 1190-1197.
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Skiba, R.J., Michael, R.S., Nardo, A.C. and Peterson, R. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34, 317-342.
- Skiba, R.J, Peterson, R., Miller, C., Ritter, S., and Simmons, A. (in press). The safe and responsive schools project: A school reform model for implementing best practices in violence prevention. In S. Jimerson and M. Furlong (Eds.) *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety*.
- Tobin, T., Sugai, G. and Colvin, G. (1996). Patterns in middle school discipline records. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 4, 82-94.
- Thornton, T. N., Craft, C. A., Dahlberg, L. L., Lynch, B. S., and Baer, K. (2000). *Best practices of youth violence prevention: A sourcebook for community action*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
- U.S. House of Representatives (2002). Testimony of Dr. Russell Skiba at the hearing before the subcommittee of education reform. [Online]. Retrieved July 12, 2005 at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/hearings/107th/edr/idea5802/wl5802.htm>
- Vossekuil, B., Fein, R.A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education.
- Wald, J., and Losen, D.J. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. In J. Wald and D.J. Losen (Eds.), *New directions for youth development (no. 99; Deconstructing the school-to-prison pipeline)* (pp. 9-15). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Walker, H.M., Horner, R.H., Sugai, G., Bullis, M., Sprague, J.R., Bricker, D., and Kaufman, M.J. (1996). Integrated approaches to preventing antisocial behavior patterns among school-age children and youth. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 4(4), 194-209.
- Walker, H. M., and Severson, H. (1990). *Systematic screening for behavior disorders (SSBD)*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE Publications.

# **APPENDIX C**

HOME ABOUT GOT YOUR ACE SCORE? RESOURCES RESEARCH OUR STORIES ACES CONNECTION ACES IN ACTION

## Lincoln High School in Walla Walla, WA, tries new approach to school discipline — suspensions drop 85%

APRIL 23, 2012  
 By jstevens  
 in ACE STUDY,  
 CHILD ABUSE,  
 CHILD TRAUMA,  
 CHRONIC  
 DISEASE,  
 COMMUNITY  
 PREVENTION  
 PROGRAMS,  
 NEUROBIOLOGY,  
 SOLUTIONS  
 229 COMMENTS



Jim Sporleder, principal of Lincoln High School

THE FIRST TIME THAT principal Jim Sporleder tried the New Approach to Student Discipline at Lincoln High School in Walla Walla, WA, he was blown away. Because it worked. In fact, it worked so well that he never went back to the Old Approach to Student Discipline. This is how it went down:

A student blows up at a teacher, drops the F-bomb. The usual approach at Lincoln – and, safe to say, at most high schools in this country – is automatic suspension. Instead, Sporleder sits the kid down and says quietly:

“Wow. Are you OK? This doesn’t sound like you. What’s going on?” He gets even more specific: “You really looked stressed. On a scale of 1-10, where are you with your anger?”

The kid was ready. Ready, man! For an anger blast to his face.... “How could you do that?” “What’s wrong with you?” ...and for the big boot out of school. But he was NOT ready for kindness. The armor-plated

defenses melt like ice under a blowtorch and the words pour out: “My dad’s an alcoholic. He’s promised me things my whole life and never keeps those promises.” The waterfall of words that go deep into his home life, which is no piece of breeze, end with this sentence: “I shouldn’t have blown up at the teacher.”

Whoa.

And then he goes back to the teacher and apologizes. Without prompting from Sporleder.

“The kid still got a consequence,” explains Sporleder – but he wasn’t sent home, a place where there wasn’t anyone who cares much about what he does or doesn’t do. He went to ISS – in-school suspension, a quiet, comforting room where he can talk about anything with the attending teacher, catch up on his homework, or just sit and think about how maybe he could do things differently next time.

Before the words “namby-pamby”, “weenie”, or “not the way they did things in my day” start flowing across your lips, take a look at these numbers:

[2009-2010 \(Before new approach\)](#)

### FOLLOW BLOG VIA EMAIL

Enter your email address to follow this blog and receive notifications of new posts by email.

Join 850 other followers

Follow

### TWEETS

Kids abused by parents face increased risk of cancer, say Purdue U researchers. [ow.ly/ciLnu](#) 23 hours ago

RT @jstevens: Brooks: inequality blues...colleged parents spend +1 hr/day, resources on kids than h.s. parents. [ow.ly/c96F5](#) 1 week ago

RT @depression: Depression isn't a one-size-fits-all kind of illness. Here, 9 different depression types you should know about [http://t...](#) 1 week ago

RT @jstevens: finished The Chowchilla Kidnapping: Why Me? by Larry Park and gave it 5 stars [amazon.to/OgXJTW](#) #Kindle 1 week ago

Nat'l survey finds 15% h.s. counselors don't ask about date rape, other violence. [ow.ly/c8Xfb](#) 1 week ago

Follow @acestoohigh

### CATEGORIES

- ACE Study
- Child abuse
- Child trauma
- Chronic disease
- Community prevention programs
- Epigenetics
- Lincoln
- Neurobiology
- Our stories
- Solutions
- Uncategorized

### LATEST POSTS

- 798 suspensions (days students were out of school)
- 50 expulsions
- 600 written referrals

2010-2011 (After new approach)

- 135 suspensions (days students were out of school)
- 30 expulsions
- 320 written referrals

"It sounds simple," says Sporleder about the new approach. "Just by asking kids what's going on with them, they just started talking. It made a believer out of me right away."

**The dark underbelly of school discipline**

Take a short walk on the dark side of our public education system, and you learn some disturbing lessons about school punishment.

First. U.S. schools suspend millions of kids — 3,328,750, to be exact. Since the 1970s, says a National Education Policy Center report published in October 2011, the suspension rate's nearly doubled for white kids, to 6%. It's more than doubled for Hispanics to 7%, and to a stunning 15% for blacks. For Native Americans, it's almost tripled, from 3% to 8%.

Second. If you think all these suspensions are for weapons and drugs, recalibrate. There's been a kind of "zero-tolerance creep" since schools adopted "zero-tolerance" policies. Only 5% of all out-of-school suspensions were for weapons or drugs, said the NEPC report, citing a 2006 study. The other 95% were categorized as "disruptive behavior" and "other", which includes cell phone use, violation of dress code, being "defiant", display of affection, and, in at least one case, farting.

Third. These suspensions don't work for schools. Get rid of the "bad" students, and the "good" students can learn, get high scores, live good lives. That's the myth. The reality? It's just the opposite. Says the NEPC report: "...research on the frequent use of school suspension has indicated that, after race and poverty are controlled for, higher rates of out-of-school suspension correlate with lower achievement scores."

Fourth. They don't work for the kids who get kicked out. In fact, these "throw-away" kids get shunted off a possible track to college and onto the dead-end spur of juvenile hall and prison.

"Studies show that one suspension triples the likelihood of a juvenile justice contact within that year," California Chief Justice Jani Cantil-Sakauye told the California Legislature last month. "And that one suspension doubles the likelihood of repeating the grade."

Fifth. All these suspensions have led many communities to create "alternative" schools, where they dump the "bad" kids who can't make it in regular public school. Lincoln High School was set up as one of those alternative schools.

**How Mr. Sporleder stumbled across an epiphany in Spokane**

It's the Spring of 2010, and Jim Sporleder's mind more or less silently exploded.

This is the guy with 25 years experience as a principal. In Walla Walla, he's got a rep for really connecting with kids. He preaches "discipline with dignity".

John Medina - a developmental molecular biologist who's an improbable cross between an old-time rip-snortin' preacher and Jon Stewart - just drilled a hole in Sporleder's brain and dropped this in:

*Severe and chronic trauma (such as living with an alcoholic parent, or watching in terror as your mom gets beat up) causes toxic stress in kids. Toxic stress damages kid's brains. When trauma launches kids into flight, fight or fright mode, they cannot learn. It is physiologically impossible.*

Sporleder was three years into an exhausting stint as principal of the Lincoln Alternative School. He'd asked for the position after reading a report about the troubled school. The report quoted a couple of Lincoln High's kids: "We're the dumping ground," one said. "Who cares about us," another said. It wasn't a question.

Lately, a profusion of adverse childhood experiences research; SC governor's veto of DV funds called short-sighted;

Oakland CA finding ways to help kids whose parents are in prison; Every Fourth Woman looking for art to promote DV awareness; child abuse or entertainment?

Don't forget calm, quiet students - they may be hurting as much as those who rage

Hitting, pushing kids increases risk of mental illness; WOOF pairs SF homeless puppies needing friends; "disorder" diagnosis for kids disputed

117 ideas to make life better for young children and families in 2202

**ACE RESOURCES**

Adverse Childhood Experiences Response

CDC ACE Study

**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION**

Darkness 2 Light

Prevent Child Abuse America

Stop It Now!

**INFANT/TODDLER DEVELOPMENT**

Zero to Three

**TRAUMA RECOVERY**

Center for Post-Trauma Wellness

**LIKE ACESTOOHIGH ON FACEBOOK**

**CALENDAR**

April 2012						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12

"That report riveted me," says Sporleder. "I'm a person of faith. I felt called to come over here."

Gangs controlled the school. It had only 50 students, but they were the toughest in the school system – the kids who'd been kicked out of other schools. Lincoln was their last chance.

"I didn't know if I was going to make it," recalls Sporleder. "We had some pretty rough kids. It took me quite a while to get on top of that."

And then, at the behest of Teri Barila, co-founder of the Children's Resilience Initiative in Walla Walla, he goes to this meeting where this guy who's part comedian, part evangelist, part scientist (and best-selling author of Brain Rules) more or less tells him that this "discipline with dignity" stuff is, well, useless. Punishing misbehavior just doesn't work. You're simply adding trauma to an already traumatized kid.

"He explained it in lay terms," says Sporleder. "I got it."

Now, some people who are well into their careers can't handle a paradigm shift. It's overwhelming. That's mostly because it's just too much trouble to change the way you do...everything.

Spoiler alert: Sporleder isn't one of those people.

He returned from Spokane to light a fire under his teachers. He felt compelled to figure out a way to do something different to reach his kids, but wasn't sure exactly how. Teri Barila was in a perfect position to assist.

### This is your (damaged) brain on ACEs

Really good ideas that help people solve problems often take such a long time to move from research to implementation that it can cost a community millions of dollars. Twenty years ago, Washington State created a state network – the Family Policy Council and 42 community public health and safety networks – to share good information FAST to tackle a big, expensive problem: the high rates of child abuse and youth drug and alcohol abuse in the state. Teri Barila, a former fish biologist, leads the network in Walla Walla, a city of about 30,000 people in southeastern Washington.



Teri Barila

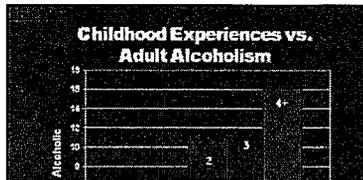
About 10 years ago, the council caught wind of two major game-changing discoveries. One was the CDC's Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE Study). It showed a stunning link between childhood toxic stress and the chronic diseases people developed as adults. This includes heart disease, lung cancer, diabetes, some breast cancer, and many

autoimmune diseases, as well as depression, violence, being a victim of violence, and suicide.

The ACE Study measured 10 common types of childhood trauma. Five were the usual suspects: emotional, sexual and physical abuse, and emotional and physical neglect. Five were family problems: a parent addicted to alcohol or other drugs, seeing a mother being abused, a family member in prison, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and a parent who's disappeared through abandoning the family or divorce. (Although the word "trauma" is more commonly used to describe physical injury, in this milieu, it refers to any experience that causes toxic stress.)

The study's researchers came up with an ACE score to explain a person's risk for chronic disease. Think of it as a cholesterol score for childhood toxic stress. You get one point for each type of trauma. The higher your ACE score, the higher your risk of health and social problems.

A whopping 70 percent of the 17,000 people in the study had an ACE score of at least one; 87 percent of those had more than one. With an ACE score of 4 or more, things start getting serious. The likelihood of chronic pulmonary lung disease increases 390



percent; hepatitis, 240 percent; depression 460 percent; suicide, 1,220 percent.

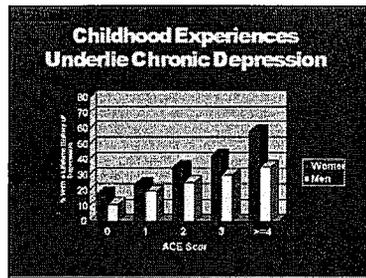


The percentages climb to grim and astounding levels as the ACE score climbs – people with an ACE score of 6, for example, have a 4,600 percent increase in the risk of becoming an IV drug user. Grow up with an ACE score of 10, and you’re likely to find yourself homeless, in prison for life, or end up dead by your own hand. People with high ACE scores die, on average, 20 years earlier than those with low ACE scores.

By the way, lest you think that the ACE Study was yet another involving inner-city poor people of color, take note: The study’s participants were 17,000 mostly white, middle and upper-middle class college-educated San Diegans with good jobs and great health care – they all belonged to Kaiser Permanente, a health maintenance organization. As Dr. Robert Anda, one of the co-founders of the ACE Study says, “It’s not them. It’s us.”

The second game-changing discovery explained why childhood trauma had such tragic long-term consequences: Toxic stress physically damages a child’s developing brain. This was determined by a group of researchers, including neurobiologist Martin Teicher and pediatrician Jack Shonkoff, both at Harvard University, and neuroscientist Bruce McEwen at Rockefeller University. In a nutshell, toxic overdoses of stress hormones stunt the growth of some parts of the brain, and fry the circuits in others.

Children with toxic stress live their lives in fight, flight or fright (freeze) mode. They respond to the world as a place of constant danger. They can fall behind in school, fail to develop healthy relationships with peers, or develop problems with authority because they are unable to trust adults. With failure, despair, and frustration pecking away at their psyche, they find solace in food, alcohol, tobacco, methamphetamines, inappropriate sex, high-risk sports, and/or work. They don’t regard these coping methods as problems. They see them as solutions to escape from depression, anxiety, anger, fear and shame.



When Barila learned all this at a meeting that the Family Policy Council organized, it chilled and angered her. Determined to do something about it, she co-founded the Children’s Resilience Initiative to educate the Walla Walla community about ACEs and to build resilience to combat ACEs.

Barila brought Natalie Turner, an expert in creating trauma-free schools, to town to help Sporleder and his teachers.

**Natalie Turner’s two simple rules for dealing with troubled students**

When she met with the Lincoln High staff, Natalie Turner, from Washington State University’s Area Health Education Center, picked up right where John Medina, who lit up Sporleder’s brain, left off.

Toxic stress comes from complex trauma, she said.

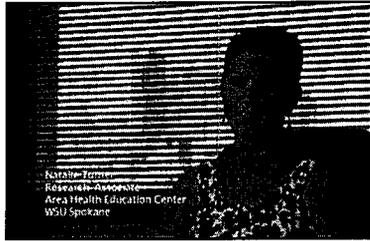
Complex trauma ain’t pretty.

It’s when your dad’s in prison AND your mom’s a meth addict AND she’s too drugged out to move in the mornings, so you’ve got to take care of your little brother, get him fed and off to school, AND you’re despairing about being evicted for the third time because she hasn’t paid the rent and the landlord’s screaming at you to do something.

Or your dad’s a raging alcoholic AND he beat the crap out of your mom again last night AND the cops came and took him away at 2 a.m. AND the EMTs took your mom to the hospital and you hardly slept a wink and you’re frantic with worry because you don’t know what’s going to happen, but you’ve got to stay cool or otherwise you’ll have a complete meltdown.

Or your fat step-dad’s sneaking into your bed in the middle of the night AND you’re too terrified to move because he says if you say anything he’ll kill you and your sister and your mom, who’s depressed AND doesn’t talk much anyway.

Teens who live with complex trauma are walking post-traumatic stress time bombs, says Turner. They teeter through their days. The smallest incident can push them into a full-blown meltdown. Some kids run away. Some explode in rage. Some just mentally check out.



"In flight, fight or freeze mode," Turner explains, "survival trumps everything else." So when a kid who's got complex trauma feels threatened or overwhelmed, exploding in rage at something that most people wouldn't even shrug over is a perfectly normal response.

That's worth repeating: exploding in rage, getting pissed off, stomping, hitting....it's all normal. Until a school helps kids learn how to control their emotions, they'll just keep losing it. For some kids, erupting is a stress reflex response.

"That's the hardest pill to swallow," says Erik Gordon, a science teacher at Lincoln High. "Trying to figure out how much of their behavior is from a choice and how much is outside their control. It's a drag when you believe it's outside their control, because all of the easy disciplinary action doesn't work."

There are just two simple rules, says Turner.

Rule No. 1: Take nothing a raging kid says personally. Really. Act like a duck: let the words roll off your back like drops of water.

Rule No. 2: Don't mirror the kid's behavior. Take a deep breath. Wait for the storm to pass, and then ask something along the lines of: "Are you okay? Did something happen to you that's bothering you? Do you want to talk about it?"

It's not that a kid gets off the hook for bad behavior. "There have to be consequences," explains Turner. Replace punishment, which doesn't work, with a system to give kids tools so that they can learn how to recognize their reaction to stress and to control it. "We need to teach the kids how to do something differently if we want to see a different response."

Kids need adults they can count on, who they know will not hurt them, and who are there to help them learn these new skills, Turner tells the Lincoln High staff. If it's not happening at home, it had better happen at school. Otherwise that teen doesn't have much of a chance at life.

(For those of you who are interested in the underlying model that guides Turner's teaching, it's the [ARC model](#) developed at the [Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute](#). Turner and her co-workers were also influenced by the trauma-sensitive classroom movement, for which more information can be found in [Helping Traumatized Children Learn](#) (also known as the purple book), published by [Massachusetts Advocates for Children](#).)

#### The red zones of Lincoln High

The Lincoln High staff took Turner's information and flipped its system of school discipline like a pancake.

The changes began in the classroom. "Teachers started becoming detectives," says Gordon. "We began focusing our concern on what we know that's going on that might be causing behavior in a kid," versus what type of punishment to mete out.

When a kid erupts in class, teachers intervene quickly. "A kid that I have a really great relationship with might blow up," says Gordon. "So, I step out of the classroom with that kid and ask: 'What's going on? Because that was really intense.' I know that something is bummering this kid out, because normally, we really enjoy each other."



Other responses include:

"Class isn't working today, how about taking a time out with Shelly (in the ISS Room) so that you can get yourself calmed down?"





When Schoessler showed up at Lincoln, she couldn't be in a classroom with more than two or three people at a time, says Sporleder. She'd been bullied and harassed so much in elementary and middle school, that being around too many students caused a stress response that made her sick. Sixteen-year-old Aron Wulf was so withdrawn, he hardly talked. Jordan Massey, 17, had anger issues. Brendon Gilman, 15, who was removed from a family of meth addicts and has lived in several foster homes, says [in this video about The Health Center](#) at Lincoln High he was so angry with life that he didn't care about the future because he was so mad about the present.

Today, all four chat easily about the school and its changes. Gilman went from failing grades to A's. Schoessler's taking college classes. Wulf is active in the production of the school play. All four do presentations for the community about the changes in the school.

"I got here, and my whole high school experience flat-out changed," says Massey, a junior who transferred in halfway through his freshman year. "People came up to me and greeted me. It felt like I had real friends here. I loved it. I call it my home away from home. It really feels like a family here. The teachers are amazing. That's how a high school should be."

Here's how Wulf describes the changes in his life: Shortly after he was born, his parents divorced. He's been living with his mother. When he was younger, he spent every other weekend with his father.

"My dad's verbally abusive. He has a really bad temper," Wulf says quietly. "My mom has always been sick in bed pretty much. The people who should have been around were never around, basically. She has problems with depression and what not. She might commit suicide. There are financial issues."

When he talks about Lincoln, his voice gets strong, and hopeful. "Lincoln's the first school I've been to that I actually loved," he explains. "It was the first time I ever felt that somebody actually cared to hear my story to know how I was feeling. My own teachers understand me better than my mom does."

Wulf is an example of the type of quiet, isolated student that Dr. Vincent Felitti, co-founder of the CDC's ACE Study, advises educators to "make sure you always connect with," says Sporleder. The quiet students – the ones who respond to toxic stress with "fight" or "flight" – sit quietly in the back of the room with their heads down. They're often labeled as "lazy" or "unmotivated". They might not be as loud or belligerent as those who drop into "fight" mode, but they're hurting just as much.

"I'm always looking for kids who are isolated," says Sporleder.

"What is happening at Lincoln is completely different," says Schoessler. "There's so much more of a caring atmosphere. Students will come to the teachers when they need help. It's something I have never seen in any other school."

Even in-school suspension is useful, says Gilman, who spent time in ISS for getting in a dust-up with his ex-girlfriend at school. "I couldn't handle being around her," he says. "It kind of helped, even for just the day, to be away from everyone and everything, including her. It helped me reflect why I was there and why I had acted the way I did – without someone telling me how I'm wrong for what I did. It helped me look at the situation and what I can do to prevent it from happening again."

#### **School's ACE survey helps kids, teachers understand each other**

The kids talk ACEs because, as part of a science class on data and analysis, they [developed a survey](#) of 96 questions that include the [shortened version of the ACE survey](#).

"It is so invasive," says Sporleder, barely suppressing a shudder. "If an outsider developed it, it would never have been used."

Since the original research in San Diego, 18 states have done ACE surveys, including Washington. If not the first high school in the U.S., Lincoln is certainly among the first in the U.S. to do its own ACE survey.

The survey's anonymous, and students can skip questions if they want to. Some examples:

- "Has there ever been an adult in your household that has hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?" One-quarter of the kids said yes.
- "How many sexual partners have you had? Ten percent said 4 to 6.
- "Have you ever been forced to do something sexual that you didn't want to do?" Almost 20 percent said yes.

The results show that these kids are grappling with way more than any kid – or adult, for that matter – should:

- 25% of the students are homeless.
- 84% have lost a loved one.
- 66% feel abandoned by their parents.
- 65% have an immediate family member in jail.
- 80% have suffered serious depression
- 50% live with someone who abuses alcohol or other drugs.

The survey's useful, says Gilman, because "it gives you this feeling that 'I'm not the only person who's gone through that'. It's easier to interact with people and to understand the way some people act.

The staff uses the survey to help understand the level and intensity of the teens' stress. They also use it to teach the students that they cannot control and are not accountable for the trauma they have endured.

"When students understand they're not responsible for the family they were born into, but they are responsible for who they will become as adults, and when they can see the power in that, it's just amazing what happens," Barila says in [the Health Center video](#).

The grim reality is that the average ACE score for the teens at Lincoln High is 4.5. These kids are at high risk for developing chronic diseases when they're older, becoming violent or being a victim of violence, suffering from depression or committing suicide.

ACE Study co-founder Dr. Robert Anda says that the study exposed "a chronic public health disaster". So if a teen's bad behavior or isolation or lack of motivation is a normal response to complex trauma, then that behavior is also a health issue. That's what pediatrician Alison Kirby says.

#### The Health Clinic at Lincoln High

Four years ago, says Sporleder, "we needed a doctor to provide physicals for our first boys basketball team. Dr. Alison Kirby, a local pediatrician, volunteered to do all the exams for free.

"When's the last time you had a physical?" she blithely asked the first boy. Ten years ago, he answered, before he started first grade. Her eyebrows shot up. She asked another. Never, he said.



Dr. Alison Kirby

Kirby was appalled. She didn't realize that there were children in Walla Walla who hadn't seen a doctor in 10 years.

"In my regular clinic, I see with kids with insurance," says Kirby. "The students at Lincoln are a different group of kids. They are invisible. It

doesn't really connect with most people in this community that these kids are the future of our small town. Once you do see it, it's unethical to look away."

In all communities, kids are the future – a costly future or a beneficial future. They grow up to live out their lives in healthy or unhealthy ways, in ways that contribute to the growth and health of their community or to the economic and emotional afflictions. And how they live their childhood determines their future. If a large number have high ACE scores, then the community ends up spending more money for cops, courts, prisons, welfare, social services, medical and mental health than for schools, playgrounds, community pools, and libraries. People working in education, prisons, child welfare agencies and juvenile justice have known this intuitively for a long time. Now the research proves it.

Kirby didn't look away. She cajoled, rounded up, lobbied, wheedled, coaxed, prevailed upon, inveigled and persuaded the community to step up, fund and volunteer at a health clinic that's right next to the school. Open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., five days a week, it's the only school health center in eastern Washington.

Kirby expected 90 percent of the clinic work to be "treating asthma, infections, stitches." It turns out that 90 percent of the work focuses on the kids' mental health.

"What we were finding is that there are not enough psychologists and counselors to go around," she says. Given the toxic stresses that the kids are dealing with, she says, it's no surprise.

"If your brain isn't healthy and you're not doing well, your body physically isn't going to do well, either," says Katherine Boehm, clinic coordinator in the health center video. "If you are struggling with depression or anxiety, you're going to have a much harder time concentrating in school and being able to complete your work."

The staff at the health center uses the student ACE survey to develop programs and services that help the kids learn skills to build resilience, specifically to:

- create social connectedness
- provide concrete support in times of need
- teach social and emotional competence

Last year, 175 of the school's 200 students made 1,500 visits to the clinic. Still, nearly 20 percent of the students "still don't trust us," says Kirby. "They're so beat up emotionally that they have huge vulnerability issues. They'll come in with a friend for 6 months to a year before they come on their own."

Part of that reticence comes from their treatment at other clinics. They have homemade tattoos and shaved eyebrows. They might smell bad because they're homeless and haven't been able to take a shower for three days. "At a big clinic, if they're judged on appearance or smell," says Kirby, "they get treated badly and the kids won't go back. We accept them for who they are. Their future is more important than their past."

Some have lived in dysfunctional families for so long that they don't know what healthy is, so they're vulnerable to abusive relationships, says Kirby. One 15-year-old girl, desperate for interaction with a loving adult, went online and found a "foster-daddy".

"She got a ride 50 miles to a bigger city, where he was," says Kirby. "She had severe depression, was "cutting". His solution was to beat her." The clinic treated her festering wounds and talked with her about healthy relationships.

"Many of these kids don't have a parent who says 'I love you' and means it," says Kirby. "Instead it's 'I love you, so now go score some dope for me'."

Kirby and the staff want to provide the support for the students to heal and to develop enough self-confidence to live healthy lives. For some, that means living different lives than their families are living. Many education experts say that kids wouldn't have problems if their parents would just get involved. But the parents of most of the students at Lincoln High are themselves are struggling with the effects of their own childhood trauma, and many are passing the trauma on to their children.

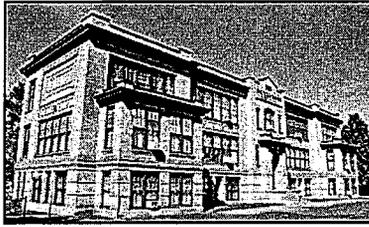
As Kirby puts it: "Their family is in a plane that's going to crash. We tell them: 'You're going to parachute out. You're going to college.' Their family is likely to say to them: 'Hey you in the parachute -- get back in this plane. We need you to go to work and support us.' The people in the plane give lots of pushback: 'What? You're too good to be with our family now?' Sometimes kids change back. Sometimes kids get healthy and say: 'I don't want to live like that anymore.'"

#### **Lincoln High's metamorphosis is just beginning**

Natalie Turner says that of all the schools she and her co-workers at the Area Health Education Center work with, "Lincoln's at the top of the list."

One of the keys has been a staff that embraces two basic concepts: toxic stress prevents kids from learning, and moving from a punitive approach to a supportive, educational approach changes behavior. Gordon says it's also the unconditional love that the teachers at Lincoln High show the kids on a regular basis.

"Watching Jim Sporleder's paradigm shift over the last five years has been just awesome," says



Lincoln High School, Walla Walla, WA

Gordon. "I've seen that guy cry talking about our kids. Lincoln is just a collection of staff that unconditionally love these kids. The rest is just mental hoo-ha."

The mental hoo-ha has allowed and encouraged that kind of overt love, caring and support that's characteristic of Lincoln and that inspires many people to go into the

teaching profession. Turner has worked with educators who just won't budge from clinging to a system that clearly shows no progress in helping the "troublemakers" and "unmotivated" students.

"If the staff aren't ready, there's no point in going in and trying to move a system," she says. "There have been a couple of schools where they've had a very resistant staff, and we've decided to leave and try again another time."

Although it's made significant changes, Lincoln's not finished, says Sporleder. "Part of what we've done is the relationship piece," he explains. "That's the powerful piece – we've built strong relationships with our kids. Now I want to move forward to help kids understand how resilience trumps ACEs.

Since he's found no guidelines for this part, he's trying this approach: He's put together a chart that hangs on a wall in his office. It shows ACEs and, on red cards, the qualities of resilience that can overcome those ACEs.

He's asked some students to read the ten ACEs and tell him how many they have, says Sporleder. "I never ask them which ones. And then we start talking about resilience. I share with them qualities that I have seen them demonstrate that build that resilience."

One student told him: "I get it – the more red cards you have the greater the chance it trumps your ACEs." Sporleder emphasizes how important it is for them to connect with positive caring adults to help them to continue to build their character and to build their resilience.

The changes at Lincoln have not eliminated expulsions. And the school hasn't done the analysis to know for certain if the changes have resulted in better grades and attendance.

Nevertheless, Lincoln's results are showing the community that change is possible. If suspensions can be reduced by 85 percent among teens whom most of the community had given up on, if they can blossom into happy kids who suddenly see themselves as having a future, perhaps the same changes can occur in other settings.

"We intentionally focused on Lincoln as a pilot of sorts," says Barila, "with the full support of the assistant superintendent, so we could learn what strategies work and how, so we could then 'pass it on' throughout the school district."

The next chapter, she says, is to see if the rest of the schools in the district can accomplish similar results. That includes Walla Walla High School, with its 2,000 students and larger class sizes, as well as six elementary schools, two middle schools, a Catholic school system and a Seventh Day Adventist school.

There's little doubt that many of the 6,000 other kids in Walla Walla's school district have adverse childhood experiences, too. Perhaps they don't have ACE scores as high as Lincoln students, but ACE scores are more common than not. According to Washington State's 2009 ACE survey, 62 percent of the state's population has at least one ACE, and 27 percent have an ACE score of 3 or more.

But Lincoln alone can't make enough changes to help every child, says Barila. "That social-emotional competency has to be built in sooooo much sooner than Lincoln," she notes. The goal of the [Children's Resilience Initiative](#) is to educate the entire community about adverse childhood experiences, the effect of toxic stress on kids' brains, and to encourage all organizations, agencies, clinics and youth groups to build and increase resilience factors. That's why she named the organization the Children's Resilience Initiative and not the ACEs Education Initiative, she says.

Still, if other schools adopt this approach, it won't be easy, says Sporleder. He knows that his peers discipline "like I used to discipline. I think our educational system reacts to the action. We need to respond to what is causing the action.

"This is such a paradigm shift, you have to believe in it to make change happen," Sporleder says. "The administration has to show support. That's what I've seen. You've just gotta believe in it. You've gotta know that it's true."

Share this: [Email](#) [Print](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [StumbleUpon](#)  
[Twitter](#) [Digg](#) [Reddit](#) [Tumblr](#)

Like this: [Like](#) 82 bloggers like this.



« [Juvenile-In-Justice project a grim picture of traumatized kids in traumatizing system](#)

[Roundup: 5S's de-stress infants; toxic stress shortens genes; trauma triggers eating disorders](#) »

## 229 Responses

---

Pingback: [Don't forget calm, quiet students — they may be hurting as much as those who rage](#) « [ACEs Too High](#)

Pingback: [Trauma Sensitive Schools are Better Schools | Juvenile Justice Blog](#)

Pingback: [Patience, not punishment, turns angry student into happy teen](#) « [ACEs Too High](#)

Pingback: [April's Facebook Roundup](#)

Pingback: [Walla Walla: A compassionate approach to discipline](#)

Pingback: [Video shows how Walla Walla, WA, high school integrates resilience into school discipline](#) « [ACEs Too High](#)

Pingback: [Lincoln High School principal on compassion and punishment: a bigger bat may hurt a student, but hurts a community more](#) « [ACEs Too High](#)

Pingback: [Friday Links \(22-Jun-12\) -- a Nadder!](#)

Pingback: [Inoculation Against Depression](#) « [Everything Teaches](#)

Pingback: [The Economics of Caring - Facedown in Goldfish Crackers](#)  
[Facedown in Goldfish Crackers](#)

Pingback: [Iowa ACEs Summit: Lessons Learned](#) « [desmoinesihad](#)

Pingback: [sanspoint. - Trying to Cultivate a Superego » On Fear and Bad Motivators](#)

Pingback: [Lincoln High police officer says farewell, notes decrease in police reports as other schools' increase](#) « [ACEs Too High](#)

WALLA WALLA -- Lincoln High School is being recognized in a new documentary for its efforts to reduce suspensions and expulsions.

The short film by the League of Education Voters is called "Resilient: The School Discipline Revolution in Walla Walla, WA." It features Lincoln Principal Jim Sporleder, staff and students who have seen positive outcomes from the school's new approach to discipline.

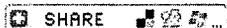
The movie runs about 10 minutes and is available to view online at [educationvoters.org/walla-walla](http://educationvoters.org/walla-walla).

The League of Education Voters, a state group that seeks to educate residents on education reforms, is the latest organization to praise the work being carried out at Lincoln. Jane E. Stevens, a former journalist and creator of ACEsTooHigh.com, has profiled Lincoln in depth to highlight the benefits of applying Adverse Childhood Experiences research in schools.

Until a few years ago, Sporleder believed in traditional suspensions, seeing the discipline technique as a chance for students to reflect and cool off at home, he said.

» [Read the Full Story \(Subscribe\)](#)

If you are a print or online subscriber, please [log in](#) to read the full version of the story. If you are not a subscriber and would like to read the full version, [sign up](#) for a print or online subscription.



COMMENTS

Posted by [DeadDawg](#) at 06/29/12 01:41 AM Post ID#: [#7209](#)

"Like"~Intervention has to start somewhere.

[Report Violation](#)

[Not logged in](#)

[Log in](#) or [Subscribe](#) to leave a comment.

Readers are encouraged to use these forums to discuss issues affecting the Walla Walla Valley. Comment writers should refrain from personal attacks and offensive remarks, and comments should be free of any personally identifiable information, such as e-mail addresses, mailing addresses and phone numbers. If you believe a comment is inappropriate, you can bring it to our attention by clicking the "report violation" link by the comment.

**Registered User?**

User Name \_\_\_\_\_ Password \_\_\_\_\_

Remember me on this computer

[Log in](#)

- [Classified Marketplace](#)  
[View All](#) | [Search](#) | [Place an Ad](#)