

School Discipline: the Research

When examining a school, it is important to learn about its discipline policies. According to the US Dept of Education, schools with high rates of suspensions report lower test scores and schoolwide achievement. Students who experience an exclusionary discipline practice (suspensions and expulsions) are 23.5% more likely to drop out of high school and students who drop out of high school are over 40% more likely to become incarcerated during their lifetime.

In order to lower the risk of dropout, schools should have the following: systems that are not "zero tolerance" (severe punishment without regard to circumstance), community partnerships, alternatives to out-of-school suspensions, restorative justice practices, trauma-informed care, and culturally-responsive teaching and practices.

Policies to Know

House Bill 19-1194 limits the number and length of suspensions and expulsions for students in Pre-K to 2nd grade and specifies what students can be suspended for, such as:

- use of a controlled substance
- possession of a dangerous weapon
- engaging in actions that endanger the health or safety of others

In response to an overrepresentation of African American students suspended from school, Denver Public Schools created the Black Excellence Resolution to reduce racial disparity.

In spring of 2019, the Denver School Board **banned the use of handcuffs** for elementary students.

Teachers and Families

Open communication between families and teachers is crucial. Below are guiding questions for families to ask on discipline issues:

- + Does this behavior occur frequently or is this the first time?
- + Do you notice this behavior happening at certain times?
- + What do you think is most frustrating to my student in your class?
- + What happened before the behavior occurred?
- + What was the immediate response to the behavior? What was the consequence?
- + What supportive options are available for the student? For example: counseling services, peer groups, relationship-building opportunities, etc.
- + What could you as the teacher do to prevent this behavior in the future?
- + Will this behavior or conversation be documented?
- + How can we increase collaboration between home and school?
- + Let the teacher know the best time and way to reach you (text, calls, email, in-person).

Contact Us

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Teach Plus is dedicated to the mission of empowering excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success.

TEACH + PLUS

Teacher leaders helping parents seek information on school discipline practices, and working to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline in Colorado.



School Discipline: FAQ

We recommend asking your school the following questions to stay informed about its discipline practices:

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS): How are positive behaviors reinforced?

Discipline Matrix: Know the tiers of discipline for repeat offenses and when exclusionary discipline is used. Ask about the discipline matrix and chain of command for behavior issues.

Restorative Justice: How do school staff help students process their actions and build empathy? Have all the staff been trained in restorative justice practices? How did they receive that training?

Alternative Suspension Options: Do students miss lessons when suspended?

Emotional Support: Is there a space for students to reflect on their actions? A social worker? Psychologist? What other “whole child” supports are available? (i.e., food assistance, referrals to outside agencies, school supplies, etc.)

Community Partnerships: Does your school partner with any community or local organizations that support families?

Student Leadership: How do students help to shape the school?



What Resources Should Schools Have to Support Students?

- + A system of discipline with severe consequences for only higher levels of misbehavior.
- + A culture of understanding trauma and using trauma-informed practices.
- + A licensed social worker.
- + A licensed school psychologist.
- + Staff who are trained in de-escalation and restorative justice practices.
- + Partnerships between the school and local organizations.
- + Reflection sheets or guides for restorative conversations.
- + Additional academic supports for multilingual students.
- + A discipline matrix with multiple, tiered consequences that line up with each misbehavior.
- + A school-wide positive behavior system.
- + Opportunities for student leadership and autonomy (clubs, student government, classes that allow for student-driven activities).
- + Teachers trained in culturally-responsive teaching (examples: recognizing how cultures impact students, using varied perspectives while teaching, communicating, and working with students).

Additional Information

- + A+ Colorado EdData Hub
- + Civil Rights Data Collection Project
- + DPS Family of Schools SPF Ratings and Improvement Plans

Terms and Definitions

Suspension - temporary removal of a student from school activities for a violation of school policies.

Expulsion - permanent removal of a student from school activities due to persistent violation of school policies, or in extreme cases, for a single severe offense.

Restorative Justice - an approach to discipline focused on repairing harm by engaging students in learning from their behavior as a member of the community.

MTSS - Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a schoolwide system of data-based problem-solving to support students with academics and behavior interventions.

504 - a plan ensuring a child who has a disability identified under the law receives accommodations that will support their access to learning with their peers.

IEP - a plan ensuring a child who has a disability identified under the law receives specialized instruction and related services.

ELD - English Language Development. Schools should provide additional academic support for their multilingual learners in and/or outside of the classroom.

Manifestation Determination - a process, required by Federal law when considering the exclusion of a student with a disability that includes a change of placement.

Culturally-Responsive Teaching - positive perspectives on parents and families; including relevant cultural references throughout lessons.