Slopak, Dianne

From: Michael Sullivan [msullivan@ctkidslink.org]
Sent: Monday, March 09, 2009 2:20 PM
To: Rep. Fleischmann, Andrew; Senator Gaffey
Cc: Friis, John; Alexandra Dufresne; Taby Ali
Subject: school suspensions on rise in CT
Attachments: testimony suspensions.pdf; suspension release 2009.pdf

Reps. Fleischmann & Sen. Gaffey,
We thought you might be interested in the attached news release and testimony concerning school suspensions in Connecticut. The testimony includes district-level data appendix on school suspensions for 2007-2008 (the text of the testimony primarily refers to earlier 2006-2007 data).

CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN
NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, March 9, 2009
Contact: Taby Ali, Policy Fellow, cell: 202-680-2419
Alexandra Dufresne, JD, Senior Policy Fellow, cell: 203-530-6316

NEW DATA SHOW USE OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS INCREASING

Most suspensions are for relatively minor violations;
attendance violations are second leading cause of suspensions

As the Connecticut General Assembly's Education Committee hears testimony today on a proposal to delay implementation of a law limiting the use of out-of-school suspensions in Connecticut schools, new data indicates that the use of school suspensions has increased statewide and that most suspensions are for relatively minor offenses, such as skipping school. Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child policy think tank, urged state legislators to avoid delays in implementing the school suspensions law and suggested that out-of-school suspensions may be overused and counterproductive.

The new data from the State Department of Education indicates that

- Schools are struggling with using alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. Schools report increasing use of school suspensions -- from 7% of all Connecticut students in the 2006-2007 school year to 11% in 2007-2008. The school districts with the highest suspension rates in 2006-2007 all increased their suspensions rates in 2007-2008, including Bridgeport (22% to 35%), Hartford (19% to 45%), New Britain (17% to 20%), New Haven (17% to 29%), and New London (17% to 20%). Suspension rates ranged from 1% in Simsbury to 45% in Hartford. The school districts with the highest suspension rates in 2007-2008 were Hartford (45%), Waterbury (increasing from 15% to 43%), Bridgeport (35%), New Haven (29%), and Windham (moving from 11% to 24%). In 2007-2008, 11 districts suspended at least one in five of their students.
- A majority of suspensions (58%) were for relatively minor offenses, such as skipping school and showing disrespect. Attendance violations, including truancy, was the reason for 15% of suspensions.

"Students who skip school voluntarily are being 'punished' by being involuntarily excluded from school through a suspension," said Alexandra Dufresne, Senior Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for

Children. "This is counterproductive and further sets back children's educational progress."

Connecticut Voices said that the new data reinforce the need to reform school discipline practices and implement the school suspension law.

"Despite increasing recognition of the problems with the overuse of school suspensions, they are still on the rise and still being used for some relatively minor offenses," said Taby Ali, Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children. "Excluding students from school doesn't work to promote discipline and threatens to widen our educational achievement gaps."

In 2007, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law requiring that suspensions be served in school, rather than out of school, unless the student "poses such a danger to persons or property or such a disruption of the educational process that the student shall be excluded from school." The law was original scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2008, but implementation was delayed until July 2009. Governor Rell's budget proposal, being heard by the Education Committee today, would delay implementation further until 2011.

The law does not mandate in-school suspension programs. Indeed a school could comply with the law without any in-school suspensions, by using a range of alternatives that many Connecticut schools are already implementing, such as detention, community service, or withdrawal of privileges.

In her 2007 statement upon signing the law, the Governor cogently explained the reasons for limiting out-of-school suspensions:

"Students should be removed from the school setting only under the most exceptional circumstances. Student learning takes place primarily when students are in school. That is why we need policies like this that keep students in school, not at home. Keeping children out of school is a direct line to delinquent behavior. Students get farther behind in their course work. They lose hope of catching up. It's a recipe for failure."

To move toward more effective disciplinary practices, Connecticut Voices for Children recommends that:

- There should be no further delays in implementation of the new law limiting out-of-school suspensions.
- Funding should be provided to schools for preventive and alternative discipline programs to reduce the need for suspensions.

Connecticut Voices for Children (www.ctkidslink.org) is a research-based policy and advocacy organization that works to advance strategic public investment and wise public policies to benefit our state's children, youth and families. In 2008, Connecticut Voices for Children released the state's first comprehensive study of the use of out-of-school suspensions, "Missing Out: Suspending Students from Connecticut Schools, " available at http://www.ctkidslink.org/pub_detail_423.html.

Connecticut Voices for Children is also testifying at the Education Committee hearing, which takes place at 1:30 pm in Room 2B of the Legislative Office Building.
The CT Voices testimony is attached to this release. Note that pages 8 to 11 of the release contain 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 suspension data for school districts. However, the text of the testimony summarizes the 2006-2007 data, since the 2007-2008 data is so new, there was not time to integrate the new data into the text of the testimony.

Below is a table of data on the reasons for out-of-school school suspensions in 2007-2008.

Suspended Students in 2007-2008 Were More Often Excluded from School for School Policy Violations than for Serious Offenses

Offense Category	Percentage of Suspensions Resulting from Each Behavior
School Policy Violations	
Insubordination	25%
Attendance	15%
Classroom Disruptions	11%
Other School Policy Violations or Rules	5%
Possession of Electronic Devices	1%
Trespassing	1%
Personal Threats	Less than 1%
Academic Violations	Less than 1%
School Threats	Less than 1%
Total Percentage of Suspensions Resulting From School Policy Violations	58%
Serious Disciplinary Offenses	
Fighting/Battery	15%
Physical/Verbal Confrontation/Contact Unbecoming	12%
Personally Threatening Behavior	7%
Drugs	3%
Theft/Theft Related	2%
Weapons	2%
Property Damage	1%
Sexually Related Behavior	1%
Violent Crimes Against Person	Less than 1%
Total Percentage of Suspensions Resulting from Serious Disciplinary Offenses	42%

Data taken from Connecticut State Department of Education, "Report for: Dropout Prevention Summit Planning Committee; District Level Data for 2007-08 School Year," February 26, 2009.

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33 Whitney Avenue
New Haven, CT 06510
Voice: 203-498-4240
Fax: 203-498-4242
www.ctkidslink.org

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The new data from the State Department of Education indicates that

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