

Testimony of Patricia Charles, Ed.D., Superintendent, Middletown Schools

Raised Bill No.1053

AN ACT PROHIBITING OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS FOR STUDENTS IN PRESCHOOL AND GRADES KINDERGARTEN TO TWO.

To prohibit out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students enrolled in a preschool program or grades kindergarten to two, inclusive.

Good evening Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle, Senator Bartolomeo, and Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

I am offering testimony in opposition to Raised Bill 1053 which would prohibit the suspension or expulsion of a preschool child or student in grades kindergarten through grade 2.

The ability to keep students and staff safe is critical to the mission of our schools. We do not frequently or without careful consideration suspend or expel students in the early primary grades. There must be a provision, however, to exclude a student who is posing a danger to himself, his teacher, or his classmates. In every case the school administrator's preference is to teach the necessary social skills to help a child find success in school. Schools provide many interventions and respond proactively with individual supports such as Behavior Intervention Plans, counseling, increased supervision and parent engagement. It is only as a last resort that suspension or expulsion is used to remove a child from a situation that requires more than the normal interventions. This is sometimes a short-term step before a more therapeutic program can be developed for a child who is acting out in an unsafe manner.

Schools need additional mental health supports to provide the counseling and implement the strategies for working with the child, teachers, and parents to enhance coping skills. Best practices include community partnerships, mental health supports, and increased parent engagement. These would be more helpful strategies than prohibiting suspension and expulsions.

The CSDE reports that the suspension rate in the elementary grades in the Public Charter Schools (14%) is almost twice that in the 10 Ed-Reform districts(7.3%) both of which are substantially greater than the state average (3.0%).” Instead of prohibiting suspensions, provide professional development, psychologists, and behavioral consultants to help schools with high instances of suspension or expulsion.

No educator wants to start a young child's school career by excluding him from school. But do not tie the schools' hands by making it impossible to remove a child who has significantly hurt another student or staff member, seriously and continuously disrupted the learning environment, or when time is needed to develop a plan to change serious behaviors.