

Suspension and Expulsion Committee Report and Recommendations



**Report Prepared for the Juvenile Justice Policy and
Oversight Committee**

February 13, 2022

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I. Executive Summary

Background

The past two years have been exceptionally difficult as a result of the pandemic. Children have been struggling with how to make sense of a new and challenging way of living. The same holds true for teachers who are working to provide the best education for their students in the most difficult of circumstances. Educators and teachers have been working tirelessly to accommodate students and families by switching to remote learning and back to the classroom. The stress that children and families have been experiencing has been felt by the teachers, while they work to manage the changes the pandemic has had on their own lives. This stress has, for some students, made itself manifest through disruptive and destructive behavior in school. In the past, one method of responding to such behavior was to exclude the child from school, through out-of-school suspension or expulsion. The work in this report is part of a longer-term strategy that began in 2015. To be clear, challenges have existed prior to the pandemic as well as the need to determine the best approach to problem behaviors in the classroom.

When a pre-k through second-grade student is suspended or expelled, they are being deprived of a proper intervention that addresses their behavior and the circumstances that may have influenced it. The most common examples are in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsion. Children of Color, those with disabilities, and those living in economically distressed communities are at far greater risk of suffering exclusionary discipline, which results in an ever-widening opportunity gap based on the compounding obstacles these students must overcome. Removal from the school environment can result in feelings of low self-worth, alienation, and loneliness, compounding any challenging experiences they have at home.

Across the board, students who are, economically disadvantaged students, those with a disability, and English learners⁷ were all suspended at rates greater than the overall average. There are persistent racial disparities in school discipline and a connection between school suspension and justice system involvement. State data shows that Black/Latinx students in all grades, including pre-k through 2nd grade, were not only suspended/expelled substantially more often than their White peers but would also receive harsher punishments for the same negative behaviors.

The most recent Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) annual report showed a 10.6% rise in suspensions of children under 7 years of age from the 2012-2013 to the 2013-2014 academic year. Following the 2015 public act's passage¹, there was a substantial decline in the number of suspensions issued for pre-k through 2nd graders. From the 2014-2015 through the 2018-2019 academic years, in-school suspensions for this group fell by over 45% and out-of-school suspensions dropped by 72%. Though the legislation greatly restricted out-of-school suspensions, CSDE has continued to monitor both in-school and out-of-school suspensions and the greater decline has been evidenced with respect to out-of-school suspensions.

Based on the CSDE annual report there are currently 15 districts identified with high numbers of suspension and expulsion within pre-k through 2nd grade. To ensure consistency in the implementation of the law, it is vital that a system of accountability is established. The CSDE initiative (done in response to

¹ https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-233

federal legislation, specifically, The Every Student Succeeds Act) is a major effort to target disproportionate discipline. Districts are placed into tiers according to the following criteria. Using this metric allows for the broadest inclusion of students who may experience any exclusionary discipline during the school year:

:

- Tier 4 - Consistently High Suspension Rates (may also have high disproportionality): Overall, black or Hispanic suspension rate $\geq 15\%$ in 2 recent years.
- Tier 3 - Consistently High Disproportionality: Not in Tier 4 AND either black or Hispanic Relative Risk Index (RRI) ≥ 3 in 2 recent years.
- Tier 2 - Consistently Medium Disproportionality: Not in Tiers 4 or 3 AND either black or Hispanic RRI ≥ 2 in 2 recent years.
- Tier 1 - Low Suspension Rate/Disproportionality: All other districts

Exclusionary discipline cannot be eliminated unless a continuum of emotional support, therapeutic services, and family support to help the dysregulated child is provided. This committee acknowledges that the recommendations in this report are in no way a reflection of a lack of capability but are intended to provide resources to the professionals who are educating our children for their future success.

The Committee's Work

Section 8 of Public Act No. 21-174 established this committee “for the purpose of studying the effects of and possible alternatives to suspensions and expulsions of students in any grade,” and tasked the committee with “Not later than January 1, 2022, the committee shall complete a report concerning the effects of and alternatives to suspension and expulsion of students in preschool through second grade.” The committee met bi-monthly from September 2021 to December 2021 and received presentations from:

- The Connecticut State Department of Education presented;
 - Updated data on exclusionary discipline for students in Pre-K through second grade to identify school district with high rates of exclusionary discipline.
 - The Office of Student Supports provided an overview of CSDE trainings and the work of the Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative
 - Reviewed the current training for school personnel and identified gaps.
- The Office of Early Childhood presented on a pilot of a suspension & expulsion policy in state-funded programs in districts with high rates of suspension and expulsion. The OEC has focused on the pyramid model, which is a national framework using a multi-tiered system of support.
- Miss Kendra Programs presented services and programming available to this age group in the community and in schools.

They also were provided significant insight through focus groups outcomes. And the committee also reviewed relevant reports by the Office of the Child Advocate, the Child Health Development Institute, the Center for Children's Advocacy, and other national studies specific to this topic area.

To combat the inconsistency in the implementation of disciplinary and exclusionary policies and to address disparities created, the committee looked to Connecticut-based and nationally endorsed recommended guidelines (beginning on page 11).

Recommendations

The members of the committee agree that excluding students from school, especially students in grade two and below, is not a good policy for the reasons stated in this report. We agree that there are times when students exhibiting challenging behavior need to be removed from the classroom and the regular school environment for their own safety and the safety of the whole school community. We also agree that a robust continuum of social-emotional supports, including a comprehensive system of support to help students exhibiting challenging behavior, needs to be established and supported in all schools. The committee did not come to a consensus on whether further legislation to limit or ban exclusionary discipline would be useful or counterproductive. The following recommendations, however, are ones the entire membership of the committee endorse. Details begin on page 13.

II. Legislation

Tow Youth Justice Institute at the University of New Haven staffs the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, which recommended legislation to study the effects of and possible alternatives to suspensions and expulsions of students in any grade. Public Act 21-174, *An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee* states

- (e) (1) Not later than January 1, 2022, the committee shall complete a report concerning the effects of and alternatives to suspension and expulsion of students in preschool through second grade... (f) The committee shall include in reports written under subsection (e) of this section:
- (1) Funding recommendations for any proposed alternatives to suspension and expulsion.
 - (2) Timelines for potential implementation of any such alternatives.
 - (3) Individual school district needs based on data.
 - (4) Training recommendations for school personnel.
 - (5) Implementation procedures for alternative in-school disciplinary practice, strategies and intervention to support students and school personnel.
 - (6) Strategies for family engagement.
 - (7) Recommendations for screening for health and mental health concerns; and
 - (8) Recommendations for strengthening connections to community-based services and supports including trauma-informed mental health interventions.
- (g) (1) Not later than January 1, 2022, the committee shall submit a report on its findings and recommendations, if any, pursuant to **Substitute House Bill No. 6667 Public Act No. 21-174 11 of 16**

III. Background

Exclusionary discipline is defined as a punitive response to a student's negative behavior/actions that remove them from their standard, educational environment, with the most common examples being in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsion. When a pre-k through second-grade student is suspended or expelled, they are being deprived of a proper intervention that addresses their behavior and the circumstances that may have influenced it. There is a strong connection linking exclusionary discipline with the school-to-prison pipeline as students who receive an ISS, OSS, or expulsion are significantly more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system.

The early education years of preschool through the second grade are quintessential in a child's development. This is true both in terms of a student learning how to build healthy relationships by socializing with their peers and establishing positive attitudes concerning the education system. Children of Color, those with disabilities, and those living in economically distressed communities are at far greater risk of suffering exclusionary discipline, which results in an ever-widening opportunity gap based on the compounding obstacles these students must overcome. Upon their removal from the classroom, they lose access to early intervention systems like mental health/trauma support that could set them up for future success. Schools provide these children with opportunities for nurturing, structure, support, and love regardless of their home environment. Removal from the school environment can result in feelings of low self-worth, alienation, and loneliness, compounding any challenging experiences they have at home.

Although Connecticut possesses one of the strongest public education systems in the country, it is also plagued by massive socioeconomic and racial/ethnic inequality. Across the board, students who are eligible for reduced or free lunch, have a disability, or are English language learners were all suspended at rates greater than the overall average. There are persistent racial disparities in school discipline and a connection between school suspension and justice system involvement. State data shows that Black/Latinx students in all grades, including pre-k through 2nd grade, were not only suspended/expelled substantially more often than their White peers but would also receive harsher punishments for the same negative behaviors.

In an effort to address the persistent racial disparities in school discipline CT statutes were amended in 2015 to prohibit expulsion for pre-k through grade 2 students, except for federally mandated areas. Expellable offenses for this age group are possession of a firearm or other deadly weapon on school grounds or at a school-sponsored event; possessing a firearm while off school premises that are in violation of C.G.S. § 29-35 or possession and use of a firearm, instrument, or weapon in the commission of a crime; and having/selling illicit substances on or off-campus. The term firearm is defined at 18 USC 921. In-school suspensions are still permitted under the 2015 law. Adversely, Out of school suspensions are prohibited for this age group except in cases of conduct on school grounds that is of a violent or sexual nature that endangers persons.

Key definitions for terms associated with exclusionary disciplinary practices are outlined in C.G.S. 10-233a. A "removal" occurs when a student experiences exclusion from a classroom for all or part of a single class period, provided such exclusion shall not extend beyond ninety minutes. An in-school suspension (ISS) expands upon this notion as it is an exclusion from regular classroom activity for no more than ten

consecutive school days, but not exclusion from school. Similarly, an out-of-school suspension (OSS) is - an exclusion from school privileges or from transportation services only for no more than ten consecutive school days. Lastly, an expulsion is an exclusion from school privileges for more than ten consecutive school days. School administrators possess the authority to implement these measures in instances where a student has broken the publicized policies of the Board of Education, significantly disrupted the education process, and/or placed people or property in danger. If the offending incident occurred on school property, only one of the listed criteria must be met.

IV. Committee Membership

The committee is comprised of the following members as identified through legislation:

1. **Co-Chair: Steven Hernandez** (A) One of whom shall be the chairperson of a collaborative group for social and emotional well-being.
2. **Co-Chair: Fran Rabinowitz** (B) One of whom shall be the executive director of a state-wide association of public-school superintendents.
3. **Desi Nesmith** (3) The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee.
4. **Donald F. Harris Jr.** (4) A representative of the State Board of Education Accountability and Support Committee appointed by the Commissioner of Education; and
5. **Tony Gasper** (C) One of whom shall be the president of a state-wide association of public-school superintendents.
6. **John Frasinelli** (D) One of whom shall be a representative of a state-wide school discipline collaborative.
7. **Tammy Raccio** (E) One of whom shall be the chairperson of a state-wide advisory council for special education.
8. **Kayle Hill** (F) One of whom shall be a representative of a disability rights organization².
9. **Andrew A. Feinstein** (G) One of whom shall be a representative of a state-wide organization that advocates for special education equity.
10. **Tianna Hill, CHDI** (H) One of whom shall be a representative of an organization that is a catalyst for improvement of children's health and development; and
11. **Erica Bromley** (I) One of whom shall be a representative of an association of youth service bureaus.
12. **Rep. Robyn Porter**- Education Committee Co-Chair
13. **Amy Vatner**- Education Committee Co-Chair
14. **Kathryn Meyer**- Center for Children's Advocacy

² *Disability Rights Connecticut, Inc. (DRCT) participated on this legislatively created committee by invitation. The Committee was required to have member(s) representing the disability community. As the protection and advocacy system in Connecticut, DRCT has expertise on issues that impact adults and youth with disabilities, including school suspension and other school discipline, among other disability rights issues. While DRCT provided education, insight, and perspective to the Committee on behalf of its constituents, it did not participate in drafting proposed legislative changes. DRCT wants to ensure its participation and role on this legislative committee is clear to all those reviewing the Committee's work.*

V. The Committee's Workplan

The committee agreed to meet bi-monthly from September 2021 to December 2021 and to consult with a variety of experts to better understand the issue at hand.

1. Presentations were made by the following:
 - The Connecticut State Department of Education presented;
 - Updated data on exclusionary discipline for students in Pre-K through second grade to identify school district with high rates of exclusionary discipline.
 - The Office of Student Supports provided an overview of CSDE trainings and the work of the Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative
 - Reviewed the current training for school personnel and identified gaps.
 - The Office of Early Childhood presented on a pilot of a suspension & expulsion policy in state-funded programs in districts with high rates of suspension and expulsion. The OEC has focused on the pyramid model, which is a national framework using a multi-tiered system of support.
 - Miss Kendra Programs presented services and programming available to this age group in the community and in schools.

2. Significant insight was elicited through focus groups conducted by the Tow Youth Justice Institute's Director of Research, Dr. Danielle Cooper and the Tow Youth Justice Institute research team. The focus groups were held with a variety of school personnel, including Board of Education members, Superintendents, Principals, Teachers, and Support Staff from across the state of Connecticut.

To ensure that recommendations from this committee were not only based on best practices but also included the experiences of those impacted, Dr. Cooper and her research team developed interview questions in partnership with this committee and facilitated the focus groups. "The primary goal of the focus groups was the collection of current perceptions of educators, administrators, school professionals, and community members regarding the use of exclusionary discipline in their school district and throughout Connecticut with an emphasis on students in kindergarten through 2nd grades. In pursuit of this goal, eight focus groups were held in November and December 2021. Members of the Research team facilitated groups ranging from three to twelve participants. A sample, presented to his committee, consisted of over 60 adult participants who live and/or work in the state of Connecticut."

The Preliminary Finding from Focus Groups Examining Connecticut Suspension and Expulsion Practices can be found in Addendum A. Youth and parents were also invited to participate in a focus group and were provided an online survey to share their experience and provide their feedback on this work. A description and results of the focus group are attached as Addendum B.

3. The committee also reviewed relevant reports by the Office of the Child Advocate, the Child Health Development Institute, the Center for Children's Advocacy, and other national studies specific to this topic area.

VI. CT Data

In 2015, Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass legislation concerning the banning of suspension and expulsion of preschool through 2nd-grade students in most cases, as the law stated “an out-of-school suspension is appropriate for such pupil based on evidence that such pupil’s conduct on school grounds is of violent or sexual nature that endangers persons”.

As stated in 20 USC 7961, "Each State receiving Federal funds under any subchapter of this chapter shall have in effect a State law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than 1 year a student who is determined to have brought a firearm to a school, or to have possessed a firearm at a school, under the jurisdiction of local educational agencies in that State, except that such State law shall allow the chief administering officer of a local educational agency to modify such expulsion requirement for a student on a case-by-case basis if such modification is in writing."

Section (b)(2) of §7961 says, "Nothing in this subpart shall be construed to prevent a State from allowing a local educational agency that has expelled a student from such a student's regular school setting from providing educational services to such student in an alternative setting."

Two Special Notes about 2019-20 Data:

- In the 2019-20 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes were canceled in mid-March and all districts switched to fully remote instruction for the remainder of the school year. Therefore, any inferences relative to changes in rates over years are based on 2018-2019 data; the 2019-20 data are presented for informational purposes. Unlike trend data across years, disproportionality analyses that evaluate differences in rates between groups within a single year are based on data from the 2019-20 school year. [Microsoft Word - School Discipline Final BoardReport 2021.1.24.docx \(ct.gov\)](#)
- “The total number of sanctions is a count of all sanctions (ISS, OSS, and Expulsions) given to all students. It is not a count of students, so if one student received more than one sanction, then all the sanctions are included below.”

Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) report showed a 10.6% rise in suspensions of children under 7 years of age from the 2012-2013 to the 2013-2014 academic year. Following the 2015 public act’s passage, there was a drastic decline in the number of suspensions issued for pre-k through 2nd graders. From the 2014-2015 through the 2018-2019 academic years, in-school suspensions for this group fell by over 45% and out-of-school suspensions dropped by 72%. Though the legislation greatly restricted out-of-school suspensions, CSDE has continued to monitor both in-school and out-of-school suspensions and the greater decline has been evidenced with respect to out-of-school suspensions. CSDE released in February 2021 the 2019-2020 Report on Student Discipline in Connecticut Public Schools.

In the 2018-19 academic year there were more than 1,021 suspensions/expulsions issued to students within pre-k through 2nd grade. For the 2019-20 academic year there were a total of 670 young students who were suspended/expelled. The total number of students (unduplicated count) in grades kindergarten through two who receive at least one suspension or expulsion has also declined significantly from 2,363 in 2014-15 to 1,047 in 2018-19 – a decline of over 50 percent. It should also be noted that there have been no expulsions for this student population since 2015-2016 academic year.

Table: Total Number of Sanctions:

Grade	2015-2016			2016-2017			2017-2018			2018-2019			2019-2020		
	EXP	OSS	ISS	EXP	OSS	ISS	EXP	OSS	ISS	EXP	OSS	ISS	EXP	OSS	ISS
PK	0	11	<6	0	<6	<6	0	8	<6	0	10	0	0	<6	<6
K	<6	278	315	0	157	263	0	194	229	0	203	162	0	132	129
01	<6	441	609	0	348	433	0	263	329	0	325	342	0	182	208
02	<6	597	985	0	473	770	0	326	592	0	356	528	0	261	323

This data is further broken down by expulsion, out-of-school suspension, and in-school suspension for each grade and school year. Suppressing numbers lower than 6 is in line with the CSDE data suppression policy to protect the identity of children. It should be noted that the “zero” noted on the table is a true “zero”. It is also important to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on schools as of March 2020 and the remote learning environment.

When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, the number of students in Grades PreK through two receiving at least one suspension or expulsion has declined within all student race/ethnic groups in 2019-20 (Table 10).

Table 10: Number of Students Suspended/Expelled (Pre-K-2) by Race/Ethnicity

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
American Indian or Alaska Native	*	*	*	*	*	*
Asian	24	15	10	12	10	*
Black or African American	907	622	481	354	345	228
Hispanic/Latino of any race	863	576	446	349	330	221
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	*	*	*	*	*	0
Two or More Races	100	73	64	48	57	37
White	465	373	292	291	302	182

At the elementary school level the Percentage of Students Receiving at least 1 ISS/OSS/EXP in 2018-19 academic year was highest for black children (6.0%) within Pre-K through 5th grade.

It should be noted that there are racial and ethnic disparities across the state, including in affluent, urban, and Alliance districts. Two analyses of the District Tiers Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data show that high suspension rates and disproportionalities are not solely concentrated by a factor of district demographics. Further review and data collection should be examined.

Based on the CSDE annual report there are currently 15 districts identified with high numbers of suspension and expulsion within pre-k through 2nd grade. To ensure consistency in the implementation of the law, it is vital that a system of accountability is established. The CSDE initiative (done in response to federal legislation, specifically, The Every Student Succeeds Act) is a major effort to target disproportionate discipline. The initiative consists of the department clearly defining data-based indicators of disproportionate discipline, grouping districts into one of four tiers based on those indicators, and then providing guidance, training, and technical support to districts to reduce disproportionality. The CSDE has developed a system of support model that focuses on the continuum of integrated tiered supports for districts. This committee supports these CSDE's recently announced efforts: "Effective in the 2020-21 school year, the CSDE is grouping districts into four tiers based on racial/ethnic disparities in suspension/expulsion data to provide targeted interventions and supports. The primary metric used for placing districts into tiers is the "Suspension/Expulsion Rate." This is the percentage of students receiving at least one in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion during the school year. Using this metric allows for the broadest inclusion of students who may experience any exclusionary discipline during the school year.

Districts are placed into tiers according to the following criteria:

- Tier 4 - Consistently High Suspension Rates (may also have high disproportionality): Overall, black or Hispanic suspension rate $\geq 15\%$ in 2 recent years.
- Tier 3 - Consistently High Disproportionality: Not in Tier 4 AND either black or Hispanic Relative Risk Index (RRI) ≥ 3 in 2 recent years.
- Tier 2 - Consistently Medium Disproportionality: Not in Tiers 4 or 3 AND either black or Hispanic RRI ≥ 2 in 2 recent years.
- Tier 1 - Low Suspension Rate/Disproportionality: All other districts

This committee recommends that CSDE amplify these existing guidelines and strengthen its role in helping districts to make better decisions regarding policy, practices, and data through targeted technical assistance and coaching. A review of other states' Department of Education enforcement practices and accountability measures and a plan for how the Department's role can be strengthened is recommended. To combat the inconsistency in the implementation of disciplinary and exclusionary policies and to address disparities created, looking to Connecticut-based and nationally endorsed recommended guidelines is recommended.

Examples of guidelines, models, interventions, and strategies consistent of:

- The U.S. Department of Education released *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* noted Guiding Principle 1: Climate and Prevention. ACTION STEPS (August 2021)
 - Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates.
 - Prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports, to promote positive student behavior.
 - Promote social and emotional learning to complement academic skills and encourage positive behavior.

- Provide regular training and support to all school personnel – including teachers, principals, support staff, and school-based law enforcement officers – on how to engage students and support positive behavior.
 - Collaborate with local mental health, child welfare, law enforcement, and juvenile justice agencies and other stakeholders to align resources, prevention strategies, and intervention services.
 - Ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers' roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.
- Connecticut Association of Public Schools Superintendents released their *Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Public Schools* which “articulates a comprehensive set of 30 recommendations that CAPSS believes will move CT closer to assuring that every child receive the high-quality teaching and learning which they are owed” (2021)
 - The US Surgeon General Advisory released *Protecting Youth Mental Health* which is supported by the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Children's Hospital Association, a set of recommendations at all system levels which also includes a set of recommendations for what educators, schools' staff, and school district can do. An example is expanding the school-based mental health workforce- this includes using federal, state, and local resources to hire and train additional staff, such as school counselors, nurses, social workers, and school psychologists, including dedicated staff to support students with disabilities. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends 1 counselor for every 250 students, compared to a national average of 1 counselor for every 424 students (with significant variation by state).The American Rescue Plan's Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds can be used for this purpose and for other strategies outlined in this document.(2021)
 - The CT School Discipline Collaborative who “advises the Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education on strategies for transforming school discipline to reduce the overall disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline” released its “Position Statement on Reducing Disproportionality in Suspension and Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline) which provides recommendations/guidelines at all levels of the educational system. (2019)
 - The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) launched a pilot of a suspension and expulsion policy in state-funded programs in districts with high rates of suspension and expulsion. The OEC has focused on the pyramid model, which is a national framework using a multi-tiered system of support. The pyramid model uses trauma-informed and evidence-based classroom practices on how to address the environment to make sure a child has support at every level of the school administration. Early childhood mental health consultation is available to early childhood programs statewide, which is funded by DCF and OEC. Since this pilot, OEC has been working collaboratively with SDE on revising the definitions and terminology used around suspension and expulsions. They are also working to increase the capacity for support to programs, children, and families. (2018)
 - Center for Children's Advocacy, Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc, and the Office of the Child Advocate released a policy brief entitled, “*Setting Young Children Up for Success: Decreasing Suspensions by Investing in Social and Emotional Development*”. It identified best practice strategies, including local examples of effective models that will decrease the number of young children

excluded from school through recommendations that will also improve children’s social-emotional development and capacity to learn. (2018)

- The Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committees Diversion Workgroup released the Development of a School-Based Diversion Framework in CT which was then codified in legislation. The plan supports the work and framework for a tiered system of support using Connecticut’s Response to Intervention (RTI)/ Scientific Research-Based Intervention, implementation of the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) and the Community-Based Diversion System. (2018)

The above guidelines, models, and interventions are examples that speak to creating a culture and system for addressing the needs of our students and our educators. This committee recognizes that students exhibiting challenging behaviors particularly young students, require social and emotional support and mental health services, not punishment.

VII. Recommendations

Special note: The members of the committee agree that excluding students from school, especially students in grade two and below, is not a good policy for the reasons stated in this report. We agree that there are times when students exhibiting challenging behavior need to be removed from the classroom and the regular school environment for their own safety and the safety of the whole school community. We also agree that a robust continuum of social-emotional supports, including a comprehensive system of support to help students exhibiting challenging behavior, needs to be established and supported in all schools. The committee did not come to a consensus on whether further legislation to limit or ban exclusionary discipline would be useful or counterproductive. The committee agreed more time is needed to continue this work. The following recommendations are where the committee reached consensus.

<p>SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE (1-2)</p>	<p>Alternative language</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The legislature and the Governor shall adequately fund school needs, alternative in-school disciplinary practices, strategies, and intervention to support students and schools’ personnel as outlined in this report for the purpose of implementing Public Act 15-96 “An Act Concerning Out-Of-School Suspension and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two effective July 2022. 2) This committee shall work towards recommending strategies to reduce to zero <i>all suspensions</i> (in-school and out of school), expulsions, and out-of-school removals of students in Preschools and Grades Kindergarten to Two. Such strategies may include a recommendation to remove the current exceptions of “behavior of a violent or sexual nature” and replace with only those exceptions required by federal requirements under the Gun-Free Schools 	<p>Implementation Strategies (Legislation, Funding, Policy,)</p> <p>Legislation/ Funding</p>
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	Act. Legislative recommendations shall be delivered to the JJPOC effective January 2023.	
SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE (FUNDING RECOMMENDATION 3)	<p>3) Effective July 2022 provide funding to build on successful, existing models of reducing exclusionary discipline such as, but not limited to, the Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expand the legislative appropriation to each of SBDI's current funding partners (CSDE, CSSD, and DMHAS) to support a 10% expansion of SBDI programming in each of the coming five fiscal years. b. Pilot CHDI's School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) Elementary school model. Funding should be identified to support the implementation of SBDI-E pilots for elementary schools with high utilization of law enforcement and exclusionary discipline. 	Funding/ Legislation
SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE (TRAINING RECOMMENDATION 4)	<p>4) CSDE shall, in conjunction with CHDI and other experts in the field, develop a program of training in effective methods of addressing within the school environment the underlying issues of students who present with disruptive or dangerous behavior as a means to reduce the incidence of exclusion of these students from school. For example, if students cannot read, they cannot be successful academically and disruptive behavior may follow. Such training should focus initially on students in Grade Two and younger and should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive classroom techniques b. De-escalation, redirection and managing trauma. c. Mental-health first aid. d. Social and emotional learning. e. Restorative practices. f. Interpersonal and environmental triggers. g. The function of inappropriate behavior. h. The identification, measurement, and tracking over time of behavior. i. Training in effective reading instruction <p>Such training should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Mandated for schools and or districts that are identified as Tier 4 for disproportionality and prevalence of exclusionary discipline in two or more subsequent years. b. Available to all schools and or districts at no cost to the school district. <p>4A) CSDE should identify and or develop guidelines for a supportive framework for support and peer-to-peer coaching for the purpose of properly disseminating this content throughout each school. Such a framework could include the designation of a formally identified,</p>	Legislation/ Funding

	<p>district-level staff to oversee the diffusion of training, technical assistance, and the peer-to-peer coaching model. The district-level staff will work with a school-based staff at each school site to implement the framework and to serve as the school lead in developing peer-to-peer coaching skills. Districts should review its existing staffing capacity (i.e., school climate coordinator, SBDI Leader in Residence) to determine if additional capacity resources are needed to fulfill this responsibility. All available funding sources should be considered (i.e. Alliance funding, Recovery funding). If additional capacity resources are needed CSDE shall adequately fund district capacity need.</p> <p>CSDE should, primarily utilizing existing materials, promptly publish guidance on the implementation of alternative in-school disciplinary practices, strategies, and interventions to support students and school personnel.</p>	
<p>SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE (INTERVENTION RECOMMENDATION 5)</p>	<p>5) By July 1, 2023, the CSDE will develop a comprehensive systems approach to identify and support districts with high suspension rates in Pre-K to Grade Two and to help districts address challenging behaviors. The Pre-K to Grade Two structure shall include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Methodology for identifying districts with high suspension rates in Pre-K to Grade Two <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collecting, analyzing, and monitoring school discipline data b. A continuum of integrated tiered supports for identified districts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide an MTSS framework that integrates data and professional learning, instruction, coaching, and technical assistance on building equitable systems coherence ○ Provide support on using research/evidence-based interventions for students' social, emotional, behavioral, mental health needs from a strengths-based perspective ○ Build staff and resource capacity to sustain implementation – recognizing the level of staff burden in the current climate ○ Engage community leaders and organizations and families ○ Ensuring student voice in the process – including planning and implementation c. Policy Guidance and Professional Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide a decision-tree guide for addressing behavioral challenges 	<p>Legislation/ Funding</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assist districts in understanding challenging behaviors and action steps to pro-actively reduce challenging behaviors and support students' emotional well-being ○ Assist districts in understanding the cycle of behavior and provide professional development on strategies that can de-escalate classroom situations ○ Collaborate with the Office of Early Childhood to coordinate resources for challenging behaviors in community Pre-K education programs and school-based programs in districts ○ Provide resources, training, and support to districts (pending additional appropriations) ○ Incorporate the high impact strategies to engage families and the family guidance on suspension and expulsion to ensure a through-line between home and school ○ Ensure districts with high suspension rates participate in Community of Practice ○ Review districts attendance to professional development offerings and use the districts use the CSDE's Cycle for Continuous Improvement to highlight the cyclical nature of improvement (Evidence, Analyze, Implement, Monitor and Reflect) <p>d. Evaluating the effectiveness of school discipline policies and practices in districts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The CSDE continues to update, post, and present to the State Board of Education and the committee for suspension and expulsion the CSDE school discipline report ○ Unpacking disproportionality and examining the factors that impact behavior ○ Review districts' beliefs, policies, practices, data, and structures ○ Provide best practices regarding alternatives to exclusionary discipline ○ Assess current interventions for the fidelity of implementation and alignment to other initiatives ○ Provide best practices on progress monitoring ○ Ensure processes to assess performance, quantify improvement or responsiveness to intervention and instruction and evaluate effectiveness ○ Provide targeted supports and resource mapping- identifying and analyzing programs, people, services, and other resources that currently exist in schools to address gaps 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide information on best practices for removals from class and re-entry into the classroom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide information on best practices for removal of a child from a classroom, including support during and after the 90 minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify social support staff to work with the student • Provide support and work with the student to improve the challenging behavior • The re-entry plan should include how to repair any relationships that have been harmed by the situation preceding the removal. • Two-way communication with families to engage families, so there is a through-line between home and school (Guiding Principles for Engaging Families) <p>e. Costs per year \$450,000 - \$500,000</p>	
<p>SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE (FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATION 6)</p>	<p>6) The comprehensive system of support shall include providing parents and or caregivers a brief description of the precipitating incidents, what supports were provided to their child while exhibiting challenging behavior, and the outcome of those implemented supports and strategies.</p> <p>6A) Link or refer the family and student as appropriate to the Community Based Diversion System, Children's Behavioral Health Services System, and or community-based services provider for access to social, emotional, and mental health supports.</p> <p>6B) CSDE shall work with districts and or schools in identifying community-based mentor programs to be implemented within districts/schools in Tier 4 or with high rates of suspension and expulsion. The mentoring program shall include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. training and recruitment strategies, b. mentors expected to build relationships with students in need, c. connect with families to increase family engagement and provide resources but will not provide therapy. <p>6C) Implementation of "The SBDI Toolkit: A Community Resources for Reducing School-Based Arrests"</p>	<p>Legislation/ Funding</p>
<p>SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE</p>	<p>7) The legislature and the Governor shall adequately fund the expansion of the school-based mental health workforce/support staff and behavioral support programs and services.</p>	

<p>(SCREENING FOR HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH RECOMMENDATION 7)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. In addition to the funds for the expansion of the school-based mental health workforce/support staff and behavioral support programs and services, all available funding sources should be considered to address the current crisis, including, but not limited to, utilizing time-limited federal funds until longer-term federal opportunities in prevention and diversion can be put in place. b. Reducing student to teacher classroom ratio to no more than 20 students and or propose plan that involves recruiting greater numbers of student aides from nearby colleges or partner with AmeriCorps and or other similar nonprofit to provide instructor support. 	
<p>SUSPENSION & EXPULSION SUB-COMMITTEE (SCREENING FOR HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH RECOMMENDATION 8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8) Create a crisis prevention and response partnership in districts and municipalities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The directive should be recrafted to create an obligation for municipalities to ensure a comprehensive crisis response system of care that does not place the onus on law enforcement to manage children’s behavioral health. b. Consideration should be made for co-located mental health interventions and or explore if portion of the Mobil Crisis Intervention Services (formerly EMPS) can be co-located in the schools that have higher rates of expulsions, suspension, police calls, and arrest. 	<p>Legislature/ Funding</p>

VIII. Conclusion

When a pre-k through second-grade student is suspended or expelled, they are deprived of a proper intervention that addresses their behavior and the circumstances that may have influenced it. Once a young student has been suspended, they are more likely to continue to exhibit challenging behaviors and are at a greater risk of being suspended again. As this trend continues, the student will contend with the same academic difficulties akin to chronic absenteeism as they grow more resentful towards the education system. Based on the data, if a student misses more than 15% of the school days in a single year, they will only have a 50% chance of graduating high school on time. Ultimately, when a young student is suspended/expelled, they are up to 10 times more likely to experience academic failure, drop out of high school, and/or become incarcerated. However, if the proper policies and practices are put into place, that prohibit the initial experience of exclusionary discipline and provides the necessary support for the student, this tragic chain of events can be prevented.

Investing more resources into our educational system, better supporting our educators, and ensuring a comprehensive system of care for students are all strategies we believe will result in our educational system no longer relying on exclusionary discipline to provide our children with the education they deserve.

These efforts serve as a major step in the right direction and truly have the potential to reshape what school means for our most at-risk children in Connecticut.

Addendum A

Preliminary Findings from Focus Groups Examining Connecticut Suspension and Expulsion Practices

Narrative Adapted from 12/6/21 Presentation to the Suspension and Expulsion Task Force of the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee

Legislative Background and Call to Action

With the passage of Public Act 21-174, the Suspension and Expulsion Task Force was mandated to create a report regarding the effects of, and alternatives to, suspension and expulsion in Connecticut public schools. This report was also required to have a particular emphasis on the role of exclusionary discipline for students in pre-Kindergarten through the second grade. This initial report is due to the Connecticut State Legislature on January 1st, 2022. In preparation for this work, additional relevant reports and policies related to the issue of exclusionary discipline were reviewed—such as Public Act 15-196 (the 2015 legislation that partially banned exclusionary discipline in grades K through 2), the Community-Based Diversion Plan (passed in 2017), the School-Based Diversion Framework (passed in 2018), the JJPOC 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, the 2019/2020 Report on Student Discipline, and CT Compilation of School Discipline Laws and Regulations (updated March 2021). After January 2022, this legislative work will continue to examine the influence of exclusionary discipline on the behavior of students in higher grades and will be reported out in 2023.

Methodology

The primary goal of the focus groups was the collection of current perceptions of educators, administrators, school professionals, and community members regarding the use of exclusionary discipline in their school district and throughout Connecticut with an emphasis on students in Kindergarten through 2nd grades. In pursuit of this goal, eight focus groups were held by UNH/TYJI Researchers (referred to throughout as Facilitator) throughout November and December 2021. The size of the groups ranged from three to twelve participants. The sample, at the time of presentation, consisted of over 60 adult participants who live and/or work in the state of Connecticut.

Target populations included students, parents, community members, educators, principals, superintendents, school support staff, and Board of Education members. However, due to lack of access to certain populations (students and their parents) during the time of collection and the truncated timeline to report in January 2022, only educators, principals, superintendents, and Board of Educator members were interviewed by the time of the preliminary presentation of these findings to the JJPOC Task Force. The participants represented a wide array of gender identities, races, ethnicities, and ages/time in educational service. Additionally, they discussed significant variability in their current proximity to the classroom and

students, knowledge of current policies and laws around exclusionary discipline, and parental status. All participants were recruited through contacts at the Tow Youth Justice Institute and JJPOC Task Force members. Future focus groups with parents, paraprofessionals, police officers, and other school-based support staff are already being planned to assist with the more broadly focused 2023 Task Force report.

For each focus group, the interview schedules were designed to be nearly identical for all participants with questions being slightly varied dependent on the logistical role of and relevance of questions to participants. All questions were answered in an open forum where people were free to speak and build on each other comments, as well as some questions of particular relevance were conducted in a circle format with all respondents being encouraged to provide an answer. These questions were formulated around six themes of inquiry including:

- General perspectives on exclusionary discipline
- Coordinated responses to children in crisis/with high-level needs
- Alternatives to exclusionary discipline
- Current classroom setting and work environment
- Agency and administrative accountability
- Contrasting perspectives on exclusionary discipline for younger versus older youth

Findings

When discussing general perspectives on exclusionary discipline, participants had very clear understandings of the definition of exclusionary discipline and stated in their own words some variation that it is the removal of a child from the regular classroom setting. This starter question was followed by a direct restatement of the definition by the Facilitator so that each group had a shared a starting point regardless of familiarity with the definition. Across all groups, participants also acknowledged the use of exclusionary discipline as a “last resort”. The reported reasons for having to use this last resort primary centered around safety concerns with the child in crisis (against self or others) or some other violent or criminal act that already, legislatively, requires the use of exclusionary discipline (sexual violence, possession of a weapon, etc.). When asked about the use of exclusionary discipline specifically with students in grades K through 2, the legislative ban that already exists was rarely spoken about by participants, making it unclear whether they were aware of the existing ban. Most responses focused on the unique needs and struggles of this young age group, especially in light of COVID-19. The participants reported that youths are struggling with learning appropriate classroom behavior since they have little to no previous exposure to the classroom and school settings due to statewide lockdowns and virtual education earlier in the pandemic.

Participants broadly acknowledged that exclusionary discipline directly harms the affected child in various long-term and short-term ways. Furthermore, they addressed having to find a balance between that harm to

the child and the harm to the entire educational process that occurs in the classroom when the child in crisis remains and creates continued disturbances. Participants, particularly among educators, also reported feeling that harm to the teacher (emotional, psychological, and physical) is not adequately addressed in these situations. There was a large consensus among participants that exclusion is often the result of a need for a moment to “reset” both for the child in crisis and for the classroom. Respondents acknowledged this gives the child the opportunity to regulate their emotions and allows the teacher time to both reset the rest of the classroom and take the time to understand the student’s needs and get them more specific care.

In terms of the coordinated response systems available when a child is in crisis, participants largely acknowledged the role of school support staff. Particularly among principals and superintendents, respondents emphasized the need for a greater number of support staff in schools to be readily available. Several others addressed the use of circling as a means of starting the day with students to better understand their current emotional needs. Participants also discussed the utilization of community partners such as Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs). However, access to and usage of these services varied significantly depending on the size and location of the district the participants came from (e.g., close proximity to a YSB). Additional concerns in rural communities also were raised around 211 and the timing of response that takes place. Generally among all participants, there was also a robust discussion regarding the current capacity of support staff and hiring of adequate numbers of staff during, even when funding for positions is available.

More specifically, during incidents with students in crisis, teachers reported fear of harm and consequences of having to make physical contact with a child. Many participants argued the inaccuracy of the narrative that young children can do less physical harm to faculty and other students, in comparison to older students. Teachers reported feeling uncertain about how to avoid physical harm with dysregulated youth. Overall, there was also a consensus among participants that supports—inside and outside of school—exist for youth in need, but that individualized plans are not always followed through adequately. Teachers in particular emphasized that when this occurs, it still falls on the educator to provide these services that they are not adequately trained to provide.

When asked about alternatives to exclusion, respondents acknowledged a wide variety of ways for identifying and addressing the needs of youth, including regularly reviewing available supports within the school. Nearly every participants reported some level of training around restorative practices, but varied across the hierarchy of leadership. Additionally, knowledge of what restorative practices entail and how implementation leads to specific outcomes was mixed. Administration primarily discussed long-term strategic plans to incorporate restorative practices in their schools; whereas, the Board of Education members discussed their opportunities to receive the same training as the faculty in their district. Participants discussed key elements of restorative practices, such as circling and conferencing, but often reported feeling that there was a difference between having a “restorative practices champion” at their school versus actually feeling that they themselves could adequately use it. Especially among educators, there seemed to be a significant buy-in issue around restorative practices and a mislabeling of actions as restorative that do not actually resolve harm.

In order to explore alternative to exclusion more, participants were asked to provide more information about their experiences with restorative practices, as well as how COVID-19 had impacted them. First, the

expected outcomes of restorative practices reported by participants included decreasing exclusion, addressing the needs of youth prior to crisis, and making necessary consequences more easily understood for the child. Continuity and fidelity of restorative practices were discussed as some participants reported feeling that the State of Connecticut, as well as districts, should continue to deliver more training and make people more comfortable with restorative practices as truly intended to be implemented. Second, participants reported significant pre- and post-COVID differences in the school behavior among students and in the participation of community members. Participants emphasized the need to readdress and reevaluate the policies and practices that were in place prior to COVID-19 to better fit the current unique needs of youth, families, and educators. Altogether, there was also resounding feedback that changes in leadership often result in significant changes to school climate and that plans are needed to ensure the continuity of restorative practices and discipline even when changes in administration occur.

When asked about their experiences within or perceptions about the classroom setting, participants focused largely on the current expectations of teachers to be so much more than just an “educator”. They emphasized the need for staff trained in the psychiatric and social needs of children in crisis. Participants also reported their desire to know that when a child is removed from the classroom that they are immediately engaged by other skilled staff. Again, the in-class behaviors of students post-COVID were addressed, particularly among K-2 students who have no prior school experiences. Participants across all levels of classroom involvement reported a visible change in student behavior since the start of COVID-19 in 2020 to present day. It should be noted that concerns about short staffing and inadequate numbers of qualified personnel in schools were raised among all groups. Several educators reported concern that teachers often do not take sick time—even when feeling unwell—for fear of leaving students without a substitute or any trained personnel. Through this discussion, educators also emphasized the harm done to teachers and adults throughout the process of trying to help students in need. These respondents emphasized the need to also engage teachers restoratively and repair the harms against them so that they can adequately serve youth and amplify the voices of children in need.

In response to the request to envision a form of exclusion where students still have access to educational opportunities, most respondents reported this was already their form of in-school suspension, but the services provided varied greatly across the responses. When challenged to dream big, participants dreamt up a variety of services that students will need not to be fully excluded. As students move towards exclusionary discipline, participants stated the need for a stepped or graduated sanction process in which the child may be removed but still has complete access to education resources and supports. Overall, the general consensus from participants was that in-school suspension still needs to 1) require full educational exposure, and 2) be a transitional step toward getting the students back into the classroom.

As the final question to all focus groups, participants were asked how they thought of exclusionary discipline similarly or differently for middle and high school students, in contrast to the youngest students. As mentioned earlier, it was again unclear if respondents were aware of the current ban on suspension and expulsions for grades K through 2 due to the fact that it was not provided as a context to most answers. More commonly, respondents expressed a concern about a lack of alternative supports in place to replace exclusion. They reported needing to know what other opportunities for “reset” would be available if exclusion is already considered a last resort option.

As the focus groups came to a close, key differences were reiterated regarding exclusion of younger versus older youth. First, participants acknowledged that young children, particularly K-2 have not yet had exposure to skills required for classroom readiness; whereas, older middle school and high school aged youth are expected to understand what appropriate in-school behavior is. Second, participants emphasized the effects of the maturity on the types of conflict that students experience. It was explained that often young children experience internal crises; whereas, older children experience interpersonal conflict with others, which may lead to more direct harm of others. Despite these differences in age and types of conflict, participants also explained that exclusion may be beneficial at younger ages as a form of prevention against larger behavioral problems in future years when they are an older student. Lastly, they reported that involving parents of older children is slightly more difficult, and therefore, schools need to make it more accessible for and clear to parents of all children that they have an important role in advocating for the needs of their children throughout their K-12 school experience.

Solidifying Existing Guidelines

In order to emphasize the messaging from the qualitative findings and combine it with existing work in this area, several of the Guidelines from the Connecticut State Board of Education's 2019 "Position Statement on Reducing Disproportionality in the Suspension and Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline)" were included in the presentation. This is to highlight the importance of addressing the racial and ethnic disparities in the students which are most affected by exclusionary discipline. Below are the guidelines referenced from the 2019 Position Statement:

- Responsibilities of the State Department of Education include promoting a more systemic approach to implementing restorative discipline in schools and establishing procedures for addressing the effectiveness and fidelity of trainings when district leadership changes.
- Responsibilities of Board of Education members and Superintendents included continuing to inform ongoing training for district staff and ensuring continuity of systems of support for children with high needs.
- Responsibilities of school leadership included creating a welcoming environment for all students, educators, and support staff, as well as engaging stakeholders to emphasize the allocation of resources to these issues.
- Responsibilities of teachers should include engaging challenging behaviors with instructionally-relevant support, addressing one's own emotional and behavior responses, and greater participation in informing one's school's policies and practices.
- Responsibilities of families include seeking out community resources and advocating for student supports within the school setting.
- Responsibilities of students include continuing to acknowledge the responsibility of following school rules, accepting responsibility for one's actions, and participating in efforts to understand and inform a positive school environment.

Global Themes

In addition to the themes identified within areas of inquiry, the following global themes were observed in multiple areas and stand out for discussion. First, focus groups emphasized knowing the difference between laws that require exclusion versus policies in schools that inform the implementation of discipline. Second, the findings suggest very different perspectives on reported comfort with, and exposure to,

restorative practices, depending on level of classroom exposure and role in the educational system. Findings make it apparent for the need to have higher level administration receive more first-hand, classroom exposure. Third, the findings suggest that an evaluation is needed of the level of harm required (as well as to who harm must be done) in various settings to trigger exclusionary discipline. Teachers resoundingly reported feeling that harm done to them was not adequately addressed in the restorative process. Fourth, current findings also indicate discrepancies in the accuracy and understanding of what restorative practices entail. Districts are in greater need of leadership support as it pertains to restorative practices. Fifth, community partners also need to be more acutely identified and utilized, particularly in rural communities where access to a Youth Services Bureau may not be readily available. Lastly, it is evident that there are long-term concerns around funding and availability of in-school services for youth in crisis, as well as with finding staff willing to stay committing during this time.

Next Steps

The researchers at the Tow Youth Justice Institute plan continued support to assist with preparing for the 2023 Task Force report to the JJPOC, which addresses suspension and expulsion of older students.

IX. Addendum B

Youth and Parents Focus Group Summary

Preliminary Findings from Youth Focus Groups Examining Connecticut Suspension and Expulsion

Practices

Legislative Background and Call to Action

In 2021, JJPOC made the following recommendation: Establish a committee for the purpose of studying the effects of and possible alternatives to suspensions and expulsions of students in any grade. The committee is co-chaired by Steven Hernandez, Executive Director of The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity and Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director of CAPSS. The committee was tasked with the following:

- due January 1, 2022: Establish a committee and complete a report concerning the effects of and alternatives to suspension and expulsion of students in preschool through second grade, including findings and recommendations, to the JJPOC.
- due January 1, 2023: Establish a committee and complete a report concerning the effects of and alternatives to suspension and expulsion of students in grades 3-8 and 9-12, including findings and recommendations, to the JJPOC.

The suspension and expulsion committee is primarily focused on the report due in 2022 focused on preschool through second grade and engaged parents and students on their experience and opinions.

Methodology

An online survey for parents and an online survey for youth were created by the Suspension and Expulsion Committee. The questions included information on demographics, feelings of safety, relationship with school personnel, and experience with exclusionary discipline. The full list of survey questions can be found below.

Findings

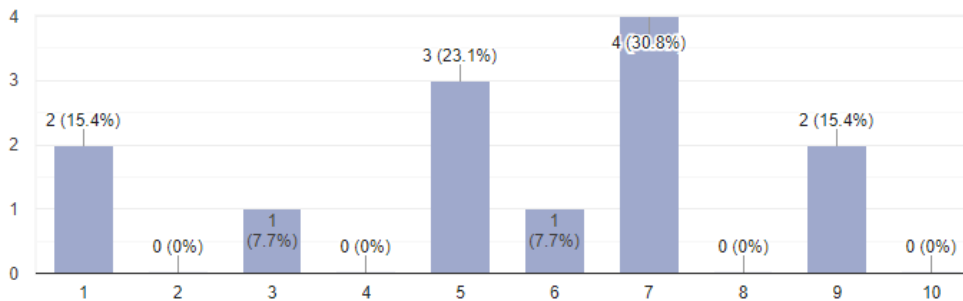
The online survey for parents elicited 6 responses from moms in suburban school districts with students in grades ranging from PreK through high school. Most moms feel very safe with the current exclusionary discipline rules at their school. They also believed young children in PreK-2nd grade in this age range shouldn't be suspended or expelled. However, most moms also believe a child who disrupts the classroom should be removed and put into another room, in addition to receiving counseling services. All of the moms believed the role of the parent is vital to student success and that parents should be included in every step of any student discipline. All moms believed that teachers, counselors, nurses, and principals all help a child be successful in school. One mom shared that, "My preschool child was suspended for hitting another child with a water bottle-when questioned about why he hit him, he said he was sleeping and tried to wake

him. As a 4 year old, he didn't understand why he was home and essentially thought it was a reward." Additional feedback focused on the need to value parents as partners in their child's education, increasing communication, creating a sense of community, and increasing opportunity for families to be involved in school activities. In terms of resources, parents believed more social and emotional supports, social workers, and counseling resources can be useful.

There was one focus group held with youth in middle school and high school, as well as an online survey that elicited 17 responses from students in grades ranging from 6th grade to 12th grade. The respondents were mainly from urban school districts with 60% identifying as female. Most students were not familiar with the suspension and expulsions procedures and is not explained what is happening.

How familiar are you with your school's suspension and expulsion rules?

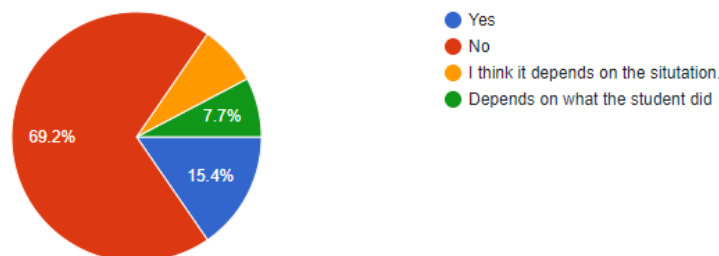
13 responses



When asked about their experience with suspension and expulsion in PreK-2nd grade, one student shared that their friend to suspended for flashing a teacher. A student shared that she got into a fight with a peer who was bullying her and ended up getting suspended for pushing her to the ground. She described the incident as being "blind with anger" and felt as if the staff took too long to intervene before it escalated to that point. Other students shared that they were given a puzzle to do for in-school suspension and given homework to do during out-of-school suspension. A few students think that suspension and expulsion should be used if the child committed a very violent act. Most students think that a student who disrupts the classroom should be removed from the classroom and put in another room, as well as receive counseling services.

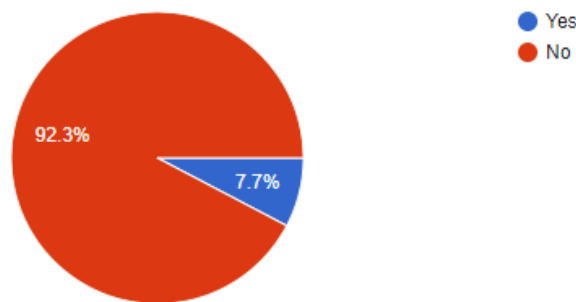
Do you think students in 2nd grade or younger should be suspended?

13 responses



Do you think students in 2nd grade or younger should be expelled?

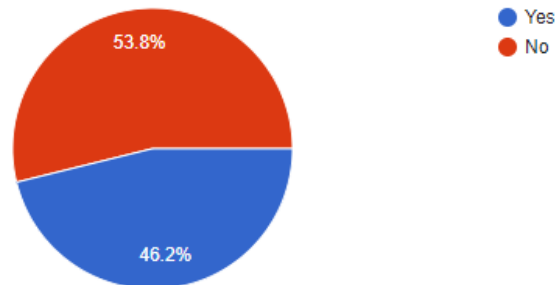
13 responses



Some respondents mentioned fear of teachers or racial bias in exclusionary discipline decision-making. 46% of students reported feeling afraid of a classmate due to stalking, violence, racist remarks, and verbal threats. If a student is removed from the classroom, respondents mentioned the classroom is less disruptive and the student can reflect on their behavior and engage in mediation. Mediation between peers should include active listening, empathy, and engaging their families. Another student shared positive experiences with SHAPE, which is an open program that teaches students about anger and stress management. One student said, "individuals who do bad things aren't necessarily bad people and always should have the opportunity to change and grow".

Have you ever felt afraid of a classmate?

13 responses



When asked about student success, youth emphasized the importance of supportive, friendly, and trustworthy school personnel. A positive classroom environment is productive, respectful, comfortable, inclusive, interactive, safe, and have teachers who are happy to be there. Feedback from youth also emphasized the importance of bringing more positive energy to in-school suspension and engaging with students. Recommendation on how to implement this included increasing light in classrooms, opportunities for tutoring, school personnel who are trustworthy and active listeners, and spaces where you can reflect. Given the interest and feedback from parents and students, the Suspension and Expulsion Committee will be engaging more surveys and focus groups when drafting their next report on 3rd grade-12th grade.

PARENT Questions

General Perspective

- What is your description of exclusionary discipline?

- When should exclusionary discipline be used in school settings?
- What do you think of suspending and expelling students in second grade or younger?
 - Who is helped? Who is harmed?
- Has your child ever been subjected to exclusionary discipline?
 - If so, was it an effective in changing your child's behavior?

Coordinated Response

- What role should parents play in the process for identifying students in crisis or in need of support?
- What would your district need to have in place to serve the needs of their youngest students?

Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline

- What does your child need in order to be successful in school?
 - Do they get that need met by anyone at school? Why or why not?
- What information have you been provided about restorative practices used at your child's school?
- What would it look like to have a place in school where students excluded from the classroom could continue to attend school?

Classroom Setting/Working Conditions

- Describe a classroom where you believe students would be less likely to receive exclusionary discipline?
- What resources do you imagine are available to the teachers? Students? Others?

Administrative/Agency Accountability

- How have school policies related to the use of exclusionary discipline been shared with you by the school?
- Who do you believe sets these policies?

Contrasting Outcomes for Younger vs. Older Youth

- How is your perspective similar or different when considering the use of exclusionary discipline for middle school aged youth in contrast to younger youth?
 - High school aged youth in contrast to younger youth?

YOUTH Questions

Demographics

- Gender: Male or Female
 - How do you identify? Male or Female or Non-binary
 - Race
 - American Indian or Alaska Native

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- What town is your school located?
- What grade are you in?

General Perspective

- What is your description of exclusionary discipline?
 - How would you describe in-school/out-of-school suspension or expulsion?
- When do you think out-of-school suspension or expulsion should be used at school?
- When do you think in-school suspension should be used at school?
- What do you think of suspending and expelling students who are in second grade or younger?
- Have you ever been suspended? If yes, why were you suspended
- Have you ever been expelled? If yes, why were you expelled
- Do you know someone else who has been suspended or expelled?

Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline

- What do you, as a student, need so you can be successful in school?
- Who helps you be successful in school? Teacher, principal, guidance counselor, nurse,
- What do you think should happen if a student disrupts your class?

Classroom Setting/Working Conditions

- Describe a positive classroom environment
- How do you feel when a student is taken out of the classroom?
- How do you feel when the student that was taken out of the classroom comes back?
- Have there been times where school staff has taken out a student that you thought was not being disruptive? If so, how often?
- Have you ever felt afraid of a classmate?
- Have you ever felt afraid of a teacher?

Administrative/Agency Accountability

- How have you been told about your school's in-school/out-of-school suspension or expulsion rules? Who do you think makes these rules?
- How safe do you feel with your school's suspension and expulsion rules?

X. Addendum C

CSDE Training List

- Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) - 38 sessions offered in two years
- Charter School intensive training on school discipline - 23 sessions offered in year one, 26 sessions offered in year two
- Universal Classroom Management - 5-day series
- Restorative Practices within a Multi-tiered Behavioral Framework (MTBF) - 2-day session
- Aligning and Selecting Practices for MTBF - 2-day session
- Team Initiated Problem Solving (TIPS) - 2-day session
- School Climate and Equity Student Walkthroughs - 7 sessions
- Reducing Office Discipline Referrals for Students with Disabilities - 1-day session
- CSDE has developed focused trainings for districts related to Special Education State Performance Plan Indicators under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to address disproportionate use of discipline among special education students
- CSDE has designed professional learning focused on adult actions, including addressing equity and disproportionality to implement coherent systems to support diffusion and de-escalation strategies

XI. Addendum D

Resource List

2019-2020 Report on Student Discipline in Connecticut Public Schools. [Microsoft Word - School Discipline Final BoardReport 2021.1.24.docx \(ct.gov\)](#)

Public Act No. 15-96 An Act Concerning Out-of-School suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two [C G A \(ct.gov\)](#)