



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

February 26, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Michael P. Flanagan, Chairman 

SUBJECT: Presentation of New Model Policy on Reducing Student Suspensions and Expulsions

In many school districts in Michigan, exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension and expulsion, have become a primary method used to discipline students for all infractions - even those for which exclusion is inappropriate or unnecessary.

Numerous studies document that exclusionary discipline practices are implemented disproportionately against young men of color, special education students, and students from low income households. The studies demonstrate further that exclusionary discipline often sets the stage for student disenfranchisement, academic failure, and drop-out.

With the support of a National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) grant, Michigan Department of Education (MDE), together with our partners from Great Lakes Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research, convened the Michigan School Discipline Task Force. The Task Force included over 30 participants, including State Board of Education (SBE) members Michelle Fecteau, Kathleen Straus, and Richard Zeile, as well as state level stakeholders, local school district administrators, and state education organization directors. The task force met twice to draft the model policy. (Click to review: [School Discipline Task Force meeting summaries](#)). In addition, feedback was provided by educators, stakeholders, parents, and students. (Click to review: [Parent and student focus group document](#)).

The attached new model policy underscores the SBE priorities of preserving the safest environment possible for all members of Michigan's school communities while strongly encouraging Michigan school districts to review existing related policies,

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adopt practices that allow educators to address discipline matters as opportunities for learning, and reserve exclusion for only the most serious offenses. In addition, schools would be encouraged to implement or expand evidence-based alternative and supplemental strategies for social and emotional learning such as Restorative Practices and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and collect and utilize data for ongoing formative evaluation of disciplinary processes and their effectiveness. The model policy aligns with the U.S. Department of Education's *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (January 2014). (Click to review: [The alignment and comparison between MDE's policy and U.S. Department of Education Guiding Principles](#)).

MDE staff will be seeking and reviewing additional public comment during March and returning in May to request SBE approval of the Model Policy on Reducing Student Suspensions and Expulsions.

Attachment

**MICHIGAN
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**DRAFT MODEL POLICY ON REDUCING STUDENT
SUSPENSION AND EXPULSIONS**

The State Board of Education (SBE) states in its 2013-2015 Mission Statement that: All students graduate ready for careers, college, and community.

Michigan students in all of their diversity must be educated in a safe and supportive environment that fosters academic success and healthy development. This is illustrated by the SBE's mission and its guiding vision and principles of universal education which reflect the belief that each person deserves and needs a concerned, accepting educational community that values diversity and provides a comprehensive system of individual supports from birth through adulthood.

Schools can create those environments by establishing clear behavioral expectations and employing preventative measures with constructive discipline that prioritizes keeping students in school through graduation. Legal mandates and community safety may require the removal of individuals who possess weapons, commit arson, engage in criminal sexual conduct, make bomb threats, and those who commit physical assault against another. In many instances, however, exclusionary discipline, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, has become a primary method used to discipline students for all infractions—even those for which exclusion is unnecessary or inappropriate. Numerous studies document that exclusionary discipline practices are implemented disproportionately against students at higher risk of school drop-out including young men of color, special education students, and students from low income households. Numerous studies have further shown that exclusionary discipline often sets the stage for student disenfranchisement, academic failure and drop-out. The cost of this negative cycle, also well documented, is too great.

The SBE remains absolutely committed to policies that preserve the safest environment possible for all members of Michigan school communities. Mounting evidence suggests, however, that safety and educational outcomes can be improved by increasing prevention efforts that focus on social emotional development, connection and community-building while providing tiered mental health and other supports. Working in partnership with stakeholders including students, educators, families, and members of the community, schools can lower suspensions and expulsions by implementing evidence-based discipline policies and preventative practices such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) and Restorative Practices. When integrated into inclusive, achievement-oriented school cultures, these help reduce disenfranchisement and academic failure by keeping students in school where they can learn and get the social-emotional and academic support they need to succeed.

A number of elements contribute to schools' success, including:

- Inclusive school climate that engages all stakeholders, equipping them with training and support for integrating evidence-based learning strategies and pro-social behavioral processes, such as PBIS and various forms of social-emotional learning, to create safe and accepting learning environments;
- Restorative discipline practices and policies that are clear, fairly implemented, and oriented toward child/youth physical and mental health and personal and academic development rather than punishment and/or exclusion;
- Dynamic stakeholder involvement that engages all members of the learning community and maximizes available resources in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and practices.

Administered well and appropriately, positive discipline can become a powerful tool for teaching students to succeed. The SBE strongly urges Michigan school districts to review existing zero tolerance policies, reserving exclusion for only the most serious offenses, and to adopt practices that allow educators to address disciplinary matters as opportunities for learning. In addition, the SBE encourages schools to implement or expand evidence-based alternative and supplemental strategies for social and emotional learning such as PBIS and Restorative Practices. It urges school districts to integrate these practices into their culture to support and sustain them as vital elements of school operations. Finally, the SBE also urges schools to collect and utilize data for ongoing formative evaluation of disciplinary processes and their effectiveness.