



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

April 28, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Michael P. Flanagan, Chairman 

SUBJECT: Approval of State Board of Education Policy on Reducing Student Suspensions and Expulsions

The attached Policy on Reducing Student Suspensions and Expulsions underscores the State Board of Education (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 policies, 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 are encouraged to implement or expand evidence-based alternatives 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 policy aligns with the U.S. Department of Education's *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (January 2014).

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) worked in cooperation with many partners, including the Michigan Departments of Community Health, Human Services, and Civil Rights, the Student Advocacy Center, the Michigan Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Michigan State Court Administrator's Office, the Office of Juvenile Justice, Michigan Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative, and the directors of educational associations, among others, in the development of this policy. School administrators, parents, and students provided input into the policy via a website, email, and focus groups. This policy is intended to be used as a guide to assist school districts as they develop their own policies.

As a result of board member comments during the presentation to the SBE on March 11, 2014, two teacher focus groups were conducted. In addition, a public comment period took place from April 3 to May 3, 2014. Comments were gathered from administrators, teachers, and the public and summarized at: <http://everyvoicecountsmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Teacher-and-public-comment-summary.pdf>.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Policy on Reducing Student Suspensions and Expulsions, as attached to the Superintendent's memorandum dated April 28, 2014.

Attachment

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

JOHN C. AUSTIN – PRESIDENT • CASANDRA E. ULBRICH – VICE PRESIDENT
DANIEL VARNER – SECRETARY • RICHARD ZEILE – TREASURER
MICHELLE FECTEAU – NASBE DELEGATE • LUPE RAMOS-MONTIGNY
KATHLEEN N. STRAUS • EILEEN LAPPIN WEISER

608 WEST ALLEGAN STREET • P.O. BOX 30008 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909
www.michigan.gov/mde • (517) 373-3324

**MICHIGAN
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**POLICY ON REDUCING STUDENT
SUSPENSIONS 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 dropout, 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 dropout. 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 a school's 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 encourages schools to collect and utilize data for ongoing formative evaluation of disciplinary processes and their effectiveness.