

## Michigan Department of Education Message # 124: Discipline and the Achievement Gap

“Discipline practices in schools affect the social quality of each educational environment, and the ability of children to achieve the academic and social gains essential for success in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society.” (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May and Tobin). One of the most consistent findings of modern education research is the strong positive relationship between time engaged in academic learning and student achievement (Brophy, 1988; Fisher et al., 1981; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). Michigan students lost 251,410 days of instruction due to suspensions and expulsions in the 2010-2011 school year, according to the most current data from the Office of Special Education (OSE). Between 2009 and 2010, black students, ages 3 to 21 with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) were expelled at a significantly disproportionate rate relative to other racial ethnic groups. Research shows that students who are suspended or expelled are more likely to do poorly in school and subsequently drop out.<sup>1</sup>

### A Discussion of the Problem

Between 2009 and 2011, there was a 76 percent increase in the number of new Michigan school districts identified for significant disproportionality for discipline. When a district is identified for significant disproportionality for discipline, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires state review, public reporting and coordinated early intervening services.

The use of suspension and expulsion also has raised civil rights concerns due to strong and consistent evidence that students of color are over-represented among those who are so disciplined. A number of authors have argued that the increased use of zero tolerance is directly responsible for increasing racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline.<sup>2</sup>

The MDE/OSE has launched a five-year effort to reduce, with the goal of eliminating, the problem of Significant Disproportionality for Discipline in Michigan. The OSE has developed a system of support to advance evidence-based education practices to assist students with IEPs. Projects developed by the 11 organizations that make up the Mandated Activities Projects (MAPs) System of Support will support the OSE in this new effort.

In a resolution dated June 12, 2012, the Michigan State Board of Education called to end Zero Tolerance policies. Because of the lack of evidence that Zero Tolerance policies improve safety, and citing the negative impact Zero Tolerance disciplinary actions have on student outcomes, the State Board of Education called for schools across the state to adopt discipline policies without mandated suspension or expulsion for issues that do not involve weapons.<sup>3</sup>

### The Alternative

Reducing the suspension imbalance is likely to involve a combination of changes in school culture and policy. Discipline models that focus on teaching pro-social behaviors, repairing relationships and inclusion rather than punishment have shown to be effective alternatives to suspension and expulsion and have positive student outcomes.

The following are examples of effective discipline frameworks:

- Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)/Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)
- Restorative Justice
- Restitution (i.e. community service, clean up, etc.)

### Call to Action

Learn more about positive discipline approaches by visiting [cenmi.org](http://cenmi.org). Read and share articles about MAPs activities found at [focus.cenmi.org](http://focus.cenmi.org). Find resources at Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative [miblsi.cenmi.org](http://miblsi.cenmi.org) and learn about implementing Restorative Justice approaches in your school or district [restorativesolutions.us/schools](http://restorativesolutions.us/schools)

<sup>1</sup> ACLU of Michigan - School to Prison Pipeline references the correlation between number of suspensions and dropping out. Page 23 <http://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/file/ACLUSTPP.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> African American Disproportionality in School Discipline: The Divide Between Best Evidence and Legal Remedy (2009/10), Retrieved October 9, 2012 from <http://www.indiana.edu/~equity/docs/Skiba%20et%20al%2054%204.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> State Board of Education Resolution to Address School Discipline Issues Impacting Student Outcomes Retrieved October 9, 2012 from [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Final\\_Resolution\\_School\\_Discipline\\_Issues\\_Impacting\\_Student\\_Outcomes\\_389055\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Final_Resolution_School_Discipline_Issues_Impacting_Student_Outcomes_389055_7.pdf)