

The Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP) is committed to ensuring ALL students in schools feel that they not only belong in school, but also that they can succeed in school. To this end, FASP argues that NO child's right to an education be suspended and that educators, administrators, and policymakers abandon counterproductive disciplinary policies including out-of-school suspension and expulsion in favor of the many evidence-based alternatives and interventions that better support the holistic development of students.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A National Epidemic. According to a recent report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, roughly 46% of new teachers will leave the field within five years of beginning their career (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2015). Teacher turnover costs the U.S. over \$2.2 billion every school year, with schools in high poverty neighborhoods being the most significantly impacted (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2015). Student discipline problems are second only to dissatisfaction with salary with regards to the reasons why teachers leave the profession each year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). For these reasons, it is critical that teachers receive comprehensive and quality training in how to effectively address classroom discipline issues.

Approximately 3.5 million public school students are suspended out-of-school at least once each school year (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015). An overabundance of literature demonstrates that not only is the use of out-of-school suspension (OSS) ineffective, a number of serious, detrimental consequences accompany children being removed from the classroom (Losen, et al., 2015). More specifically, students who have experienced even one out-of-school suspension (OSS) are up to **10 times more likely** to ultimately drop out of school (Gonzales, Richards, & Seeley, 2002; Wraight, 2012) and are significantly more likely to later be involved in the juvenile justice system (Skiba et al., 2006). In addition to depriving children of instructional time and causing them to fall behind academically, evidence indicates these youth will later experience increased financial hardship, greater involvement with criminal justice systems, poor health, fewer civic contributions, and increased use of public assistance (Jerald, 2006; Rumberger, 1987). National data collected by the Office of Civil Rights confirms significant disproportionality in the use of OSS, namely with an overrepresentation of historically disadvantaged groups including children of color in the use of suspension even after accounting for socioeconomic status (Losen et al., 2015). Compared to other groups, evidence also suggests African American students have less access to the behavioral and mental health services that prevent problem behavior (Ramey, 2015).

A Call to Action. Prominent organizations have put forth policy statements discouraging the use of suspension and expulsion because of the overwhelming evidence confirming that these practices are a counterproductive means of intervening on problem behavior. The American Psychological Association (APA) noted "rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption however, school suspension in general appears to predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspension among those who are suspended" (Skiba et al., 2006). Moreover, APA found that schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion also have less satisfactory ratings of school climate and school governance procedures, spend more time on disciplinary matters, and demonstrate lower rates of academic achievement even when controlling for socioeconomic status. These concerns have been echoed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP; 2013), the National Education Association (Flannery, 2015), and the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (Stetson & Collins, 2010).

Leaders in Reform. As the momentum builds to end the school-to-prison pipeline and expert organizations take firm stances against harmful disciplinary practices, several states have begun enacting policies to address the issue. Legislation banning or restricting the use of suspensions and expulsions has been enacted in Colorado, Maryland, Minneapolis, and California; consequently, a number of positive outcomes including increased school attendance, punctuality, and achievement gains are being realized. In Maryland, for example, where a law was passed in 2004 requiring elementary schools that suspend more than 10% of its school population to engage in discipline reform, suspension rates have dramatically decreased (Losen et al., 2015).

The Time for Florida is NOW! The state of Florida removes more children from school for disciplinary reasons than any other state and is the worst perpetrator of the school-to-prison pipeline in the country. According to a report conducted by The Center for Civil Rights Remedies, Florida has the highest overall suspension rates for both elementary and secondary education students in the country and is third in the country in terms of school-based arrests (Zubak-Skies & Wieder, 2015). Florida was identified as one of only seven states where the number of elementary schools with high rates of suspension far outnumbered the schools with rates of suspension closer to the national average (Losen et al., 2015). When examining suspensions based on disability status, over 37% of students who are suspended are also identified as having a disability, compared to the national average of approximately 18% of students who are suspended having an identified disability (Losen et al., 2015). These harsh and ineffective disciplinary practices disproportionately impact African-Americans, who represent 44% of out-of-school suspensions in Florida despite being only 22% of the student population (Losen et al., 2015). Finally, in addition to the increased criminalization and disproportionate discipline affecting African American students, there is reason to believe that the schools these students attend are significantly lacking in access to school staff trained in mental health and positive behavior management strategies who may better support their needs. For instance, recent figures indicate there is only one school psychologist for every 1,948 students in the state of Florida – far exceeding the ratio of 500-700 students per school psychologist recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).

FASP urges Florida legislators and policy-makers to take the following actions to eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline:

- Ban the use of out-of-school suspension for minor infractions including defiance/noncompliance and other minor, nonviolent behavioral violations
- Ban the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion for ALL behavioral incidents involving our youngest and most vulnerable students in preschool and elementary schools
- Mandate that teachers and other school professionals take at least one college credit or 20 hours of in-service training on classroom management and/or behavior interventions as well as information related to the school-to-prison pipeline crisis
- Require all School Resource Officers (SROs) to be trained in differentiating criminal misconduct from misbehavior as well as a broader understanding of how to de-escalate potentially violent situations
- Provide technical and financial assistance to districts and schools in order to improve behavioral and mental health services for students
- Reduce ratios of students to student services personnel based on professional recommendation from national organizations
 - National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a school psychologist-to-student ratio of 1:500-700
 - American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a school counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250
 - National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommends a ratio of school social worker-to-students of 1:50-250

FASP urges educators at the state, district and school levels to implement the following evidence-based alternatives to out-of-school suspension and expulsion, as outlined by the related NASP Position Statement, “Appropriate Behavioral, Social, and Emotional Supports to Meet the Needs of All Students” (NASP, 2009):

- Utilize School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) to prevent problem behavior;
- Implement Restorative Justice behavioral programming to improve school climate and safety, promote a sense of accountability and responsibility for behavior, and develop competency in problem solving;
- Institute school-wide social skills training that teaches more appropriate alternatives to problem behavior;
- Invest in transition to Kindergarten programs that help children to better adjust to the behavioral and social expectations of a school setting

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