

CLIMATE CHANGE

CREATING SAFE, SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS
FOR ALL STUDENTS

August 2015



Educators  Excellence

New York

"As a black teacher of students of color, the race-based disparities in punitive consequences are of particular concern to me. I fear that we do not allow children of color the same freedom to make mistakes and be children that we allow their white counterparts. They should be entitled to this freedom, and as teachers we should fiercely protect it."

**AMBER PETERSON, ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER,
INNOVATE MANHATTAN CHARTER SCHOOL**

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Creating Safe, Supportive Schools for all Students

Support for Schools



Support for Teachers



Support for Students



Transparency & Accountability



DISTRICT

Establish and study a Restorative Justice pilot program in a significant number of schools.

Expand and disseminate a menu of options and an online toolkit for schoolwide culture systems that include Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), Restorative Justice, and other nonpunitive approaches.

Create a school-based tracking system for student removals from the classroom, segmented by teacher and linked to observation reports, to further the use of individualized school climate data.

Require schools to include a school culture goal in their Comprehensive Educational Plans (CEPs).

Expand trainings in Restorative Justice and PBIS practices, de-escalation, adolescent growth and development, and other areas that support positive school culture and nonpunitive approaches to discipline.

Create, expand, and fund teacher career ladders dedicated to establishing nonpunitive discipline models and positive school cultures.

Prioritize additional training for evaluators and mentors on giving specific feedback related to positive classroom culture building and management techniques.

Create a classroom management, school climate, and de-escalation framework that is shared with teacher preparation programs.

Provide “effective” and “highly effective” teachers who work at Alternative Learning Centers (ALCs) a differential of \$7,500.

Establish a minimum school counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250.

For suspensions lasting more than five days, require that the student’s reintegration process include a re-entry interview during which an academic and social-emotional plan are created.

Eliminate the principal’s suspension as a possible consequence for a first offense of insubordination (referred to as A22 or B21 in the discipline code) and require multiple, documented guidance interventions before a suspension for A22/B21 can be issued.

Create a clear process for removing metal detectors in schools by requiring school leadership to actively choose to keep metal detectors every two years.

Feature disaggregated suspension and school climate data on school quality snapshots.

Require schools struggling with climate to establish and use schoolwide systems for improving culture.

Institute school quality reports and quality reviews for ALCs.

STATE

Create a competitive grant program to incentivize schools and districts to use innovative approaches to school climate.

Require teacher preparation programs to survey graduates on how well they were prepared to build classroom culture and publicly release the results.

Require the public release of school-level climate data disaggregated by demographics and infractions, including rates of suspensions, number of students suspended, and frequency of school arrests.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, many students in New York City walk into schools that are not safe, welcoming, or conducive to learning. Our schools contribute to these conditions when we respond to student misbehaviors and acts of defiance with exclusionary and punitive discipline practices. Too often, students are removed from their classrooms through suspension, expulsion, or in-school arrest. This cycle can break students' trust in school, place them on a negative path, and set them behind academically. We have seen it firsthand in our own school communities, and we cannot allow it to continue.

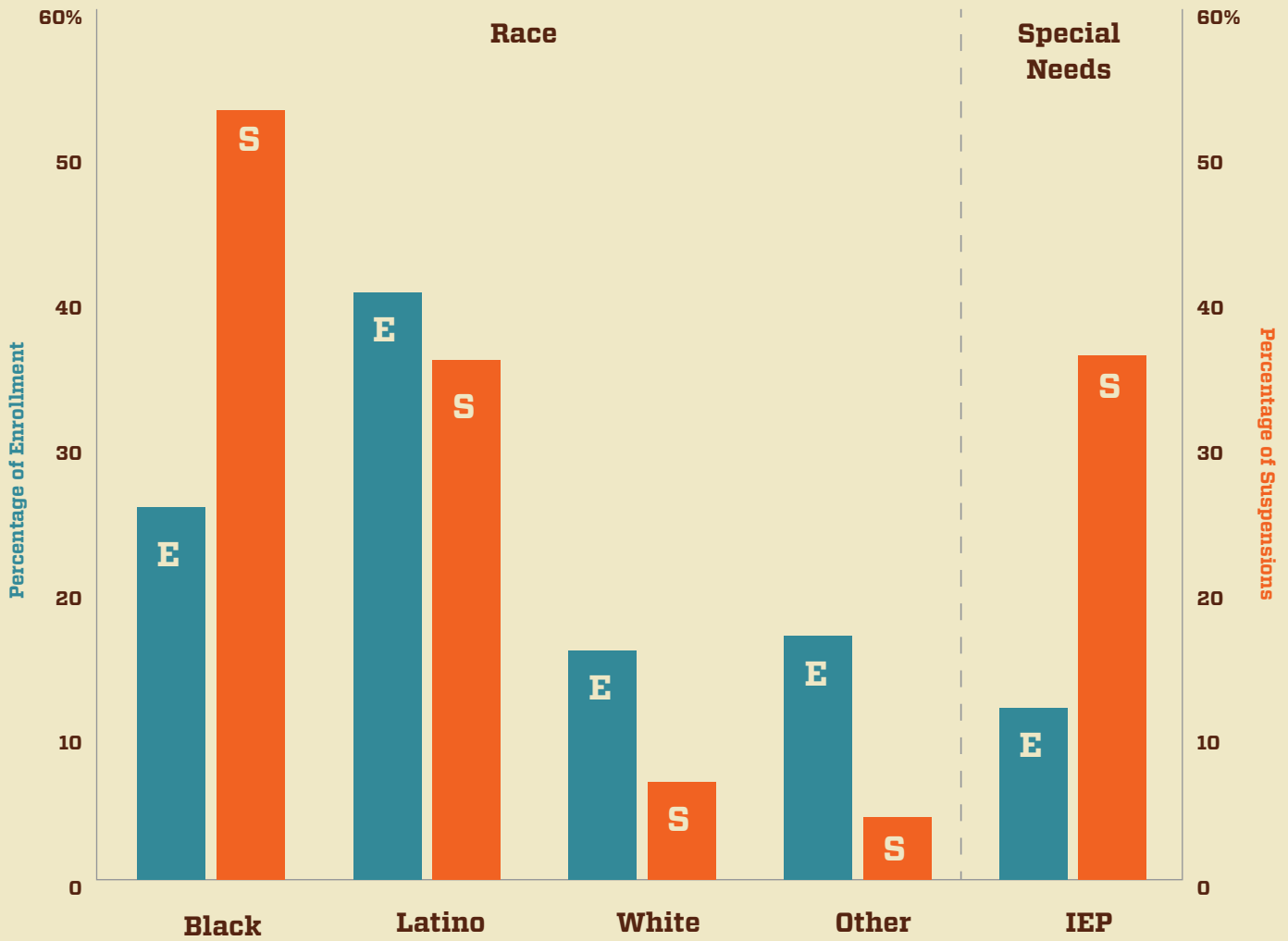
Exclusionary discipline policies negatively impact students, forcing them to miss crucial learning opportunities. For example, a strong body of evidence suggests that suspensions correlate with—and in some cases cause—a range of negative long-term outcomes: higher dropout rates, lower grades, and behavioral problems later in life.¹ These effects disproportionately burden students of color² and those diagnosed with special needs, because these populations are suspended at significantly higher rates.

“Suspensions are pushing our students away, when we need to be pulling them in.”

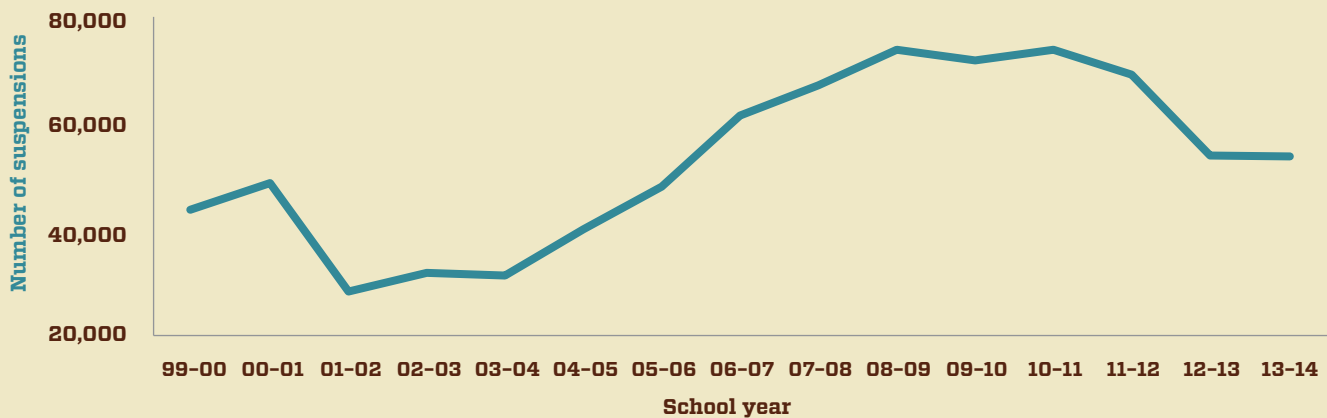
Chris Baribault, Dean of students, P.S./M.S. 043

Suspension Compared to Enrollment in NYC Public Schools

2013-14



Total Student Suspensions by Year in New York City Public Schools



In the 2013–14 school year, there were 53,504 total suspensions across New York City’s 1,800 district public schools.³ Black students make up more than half of these suspensions, yet they comprise only a quarter of the district’s student population. Similarly, students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) make up 36 percent of all suspensions, yet they comprise just 12 percent of the student population. Though suspension rates have fallen in recent years, current suspension numbers are nearly double those of the 2001–02 school year.

The toll that poor school climate takes is not limited to students. Our poll of New York City teachers found that about two-thirds of teachers in our sample identified student discipline as a challenging issue in their schools. Even more said that they knew colleagues who had left the profession because of student discipline issues. Empirical evidence supports this claim. One report found that 75 percent of New York City middle-school teachers considering leaving their schools cited student discipline problems as one of the reasons why.⁴ According to another study, “Teachers tend to leave high schools with high rates of student misbehavior, where students frequently face disciplinary problems and where many students feel unsafe in school.”⁵ High rates of teacher attrition—which negatively impact school culture and increase the number of inexperienced teachers—harm student achievement.⁶

Supporters of punitive and exclusionary discipline policies argue that removing disruptive students from class helps the remaining students learn. There is some evidence to suggest that, in certain circumstances, suspensions of disruptive students can benefit their peers.⁷ Yet an emerging strand of research challenges this view, finding that when schools implement harsh discipline policies, all students—including those who remain in class—are harmed.⁸

As educators, we know that there are more effective ways of improving behavior in our classrooms than removing our students. In our poll of New York City teachers, only 16 percent agree or strongly agree that suspensions are an effective method of student discipline.⁹

There is another way. We can change policies to support students, teachers, and schools in using positive discipline practices and reduce the use of punitive methods. This paper lays out our vision for improving school climate policies by combining support, innovation, transparency, and accountability to ensure that we create safe learning environments without exclusionary discipline policies.

POLL

Student discipline is challenging in my school.

65%

Agree or Strongly Agree

31%

Disagree or Strongly Disagree

4%

Undecided

Source: E4E–New York internal survey of members, n=212.

POLL

I know teachers who have left the profession because of student discipline.

76%

Agree or Strongly Agree

14%

Disagree or Strongly Disagree

10%

Undecided

Suspensions are generally an effective method of student discipline.

16%

Agree or Strongly Agree

62%

Disagree or Strongly Disagree

22%

Undecided

Source: E4E-New York internal survey of members, n=212.

"Our hope is to provide strategies to help our schools succeed—to give our students the tools they need to be successful citizens."

Jen Knizeski, Second grade teacher, P.S. X176, District 75



FUNDING

We would be remiss if we did not mention a substantial impediment to implementing new approaches: funding. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity has highlighted the fact that New York State has been delinquent in its obligation to fully invest in its schools. Since New York has one of the least equitable school financing systems in the country¹⁰, the burden has been most felt by high-needs schools, including those in New York City. Schools already have many competing priorities, and often lack the staff, time, or resources necessary for a well-rounded education. School discipline and climate reform will succeed only if schools and students receive the funding they deserve.

One report found that although New York spends more money on education than almost any other state, we came in 45th in the nation in terms of funding fairness.¹¹ That means that our highest-poverty schools, like those in New York City, are getting the fewest resources when they need the most.

We know from experience—of overcrowded classrooms, lack of support staff, outdated textbooks, and digging into our own pockets for supplies—that when money is spent well, student outcomes can improve. Research backs up this claim. One particularly rigorous study looked at national data and found that school funding increases had significantly positive effects on students' long-term outcomes, particularly for those who grew up in poverty.¹² Similarly, a meta-analysis of the empirical literature on school spending came to the same conclusion—that more money improves student outcomes.¹³

Simply put, New York students deserve an equitable education system, and equitable funding is a critical piece in the puzzle of improving school climate. From increasing the number of school counselors to expanding trainings for nonpunitive approaches to discipline, but we believe them to be well worth the investment.

To make the promise of school climate reform real, New York State policymakers must prioritize a full and equitable school funding system.

“Public schools in New York City serve students living in poverty. The message we send is that despite their economic status, the DOE will provide students a ‘rich’ education that will help them accomplish their dreams. Dreams of becoming an astronaut, a doctor, a pilot, an inventor, or an entrepreneur are all possible. We say there is no limit to their ambitions. When students believe us, and demonstrate a passion for learning and motivation for succeeding, their minds blossom. But it is then that we must press the brakes because of a lack of funding for books, special projects, or field trips. We then have to limit our students’ imagination because they live in poverty. We have to cap their innovative minds because they attend a school in a state that doesn't equitably allocate the funds to support the education of the leaders of tomorrow.”

Eufemia A. Nuñez

Language arts teacher and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support leader, P.S. K396, District 75



DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Establish and study a Restorative Justice pilot program in a significant number of schools.

Restorative Justice (RJ) programs are one of the most intriguing innovations for improving school community and reducing exclusionary discipline. Initial reports from schools and districts who have implemented restorative approaches are encouraging. Oakland,¹⁴ Los Angeles,¹⁵ Ypsilanti High School in Michigan,¹⁶ and Aurora, Colorado¹⁷ all offer positive feedback from staff and students, suggesting that this approach can work. Moreover, our own experiences and those of our colleagues suggest the same—which is perhaps one reason our union, the United Federation of Teachers, and our district have called for greater support for RJ programs.¹⁸

Even with the promising evidence around RJ, there has not been sufficient rigorous empirical research to implement this program across the whole district. For that reason, we support piloting an RJ program in New York City and tracking its impact on disciplinary actions, school culture, and student achievement. We are encouraged that the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) recently announced that it will invest in restorative practices.¹⁹

To implement a pilot effectively and gather important data, we recommend the following:

- Schools should be selected for the RJ pilot based on demonstrated interest by staff and administration, as well as school need as measured by school climate data such as suspensions and discipline incidents.
- Schools in the pilot should have a dedicated staff member to coordinate the RJ program and train community members. It is crucial that the DOE invest in a full-time RJ coordinator for these pilot schools.
- The DOE should study the results of this pilot. The DOE needs to look at how the implementation of the program affects schools' suspension rates and discipline incidents. Other measures of progress—particularly student achievement and teacher, family, and student satisfaction—should also be carefully examined in order to understand the full effects of RJ. To do this, the DOE should measure schools' improvement over time and compare RJ schools to similarly situated schools that do not implement RJ. This would add to both New York City's and other districts' body of knowledge about what works for school climate. New York City has a history of piloting innovative programs and studying their results²⁰—it should continue this tradition in the realm of school climate.

RECENT NYC DOE REFORMS

In June 2015, the DOE released its plan of preliminary action steps to improve school climate, which we support. The changes include increasing oversight in the school suspension process, investing in restorative practices in schools, leveraging the Learning Partners program to pair struggling schools with more successful ones, and improving training for School Safety Agents (SSAs).²¹ These changes move in the right direction, and the administration deserves tremendous credit for taking this important first step. We are encouraging the DOE to go further: invest more resources, incentivize more innovation, and create more transparency. We believe our paper is a blueprint for doing just that.

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

Although there is not a singular definition of restorative justice (sometimes referred to more broadly as “restorative approaches”), the general idea is an approach to solving conflicts that “focuses on repair of harm and prevention of re-occurrence.”²² This often involves circles in which individuals can share their perspectives in a safe and welcoming space in order to solve conflicts. Supporters of RJ emphasize that although it is intended to reduce and even replace punitive forms of discipline, it is not meant to be an abdication of accountability or consequences. Some argue that confronting an individual whom you harmed or acknowledging a mistake in front of your community is in fact a deeper, and thus more effective, form of accountability.²³

Expand and disseminate a menu of options and an online toolkit for schoolwide culture systems that include Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), Restorative Justice, and other nonpunitive approaches. In our survey of New York City teachers, the result that stood out most was the 73 percent of teachers who agreed that their schools could benefit from a more “systematic, schoolwide approach to student discipline.” In fact, there is some research to suggest that schools using comprehensive schoolwide behavior systems experience larger student achievement gains.^{24,25} This evidence, along with our own experiences, convinces us that schools need more tools to implement more integrated systems of discipline.

We anticipate that the biggest barrier to initiating school-wide discipline systems will be putting in place the necessary support and tools. However, research and experience suggest it is a worthy investment. Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), which focuses on building student and staff buy-in for a set of positive behaviors,²⁶ has a solid body of research suggesting positive effects on school climate.²⁷

To support schools in this process, the DOE should build out toolkits that support schools in smoothly implementing RJ and/or PBIS across buildings. Such toolkits should include information on the practice, curriculum for training staff and students, exemplar videos, and ideas for building buy-in. To some extent, much of this content already exists. The DOE’s role should be to aggregate and disseminate it.

The DOE has already done an excellent job on this front with its PBIS website. It should continue to add helpful content in response to teachers’ needs, and should build out a similar site for RJ practices, as well as other schoolwide systems that might be beneficial.

“Implementing an innovative system of discipline is a communitywide effort that requires significant time, energy, and resources. The initial investment is heavy, but ultimately the rewards are mighty: academic and personal growth for every child.”

Maura Henry

ESL teacher, The Young Women’s Leadership School of Astoria

ANECDOTE

To kick off this year, my school reviewed our incident report data in the summer to decide where extra attention was needed. As a school, we felt that the respectful behavior expectations we hold our students accountable for were solid in all areas of their school day. However, disrespectful behaviors, including minor aggression and verbal disrespect, still spiked during lunchtime and then permeated into instruction time after lunch. We are proud to say that with the implementation of a few very creative structures, and systems specific to the lunchroom environment—such as creating the role of lunchroom coordinator and explicitly practicing lunchroom routines with students—we have made great gains. Incidents have decreased dramatically. Lunchroom problems are now resolved before students return to the classroom, so they are ready for instructional learning time. This is an important example of how my school was able to use data to inform and ultimately improve our climate.

Dr. Nancy M. Camacho

Librarian, Readers' Theater instructor, and mentor teacher, P.S. 396

POLL

My school could benefit from a more systematic, schoolwide approach to student discipline.

73%

Agree or Strongly Agree

15%

Disagree or Strongly Disagree

12%

Undecided

Source: E4E-New York internal survey of members, n=212.

“Students need to be built up with restorative justice—not beaten down by punitive consequences.”

Rahul Patel

Living environment teacher, Mott Hall V

Create a school-based tracking system for student removals from the classroom, segmented by teacher and linked to observation reports, to further the use of individualized school climate data. We know that many schools use academic data to improve instruction;^{28,29} this same philosophy should apply to school climate as well. To this end, we propose the creation of a user-friendly internal tracking system to monitor discipline incidents, such as student removal from class. This can then be cross-referenced with teachers’ observation scores to find areas of strength and growth. Teachers and evaluators should both have access to this data so that the process is transparent.

The purpose of this data should be formative—not as a mechanized part of teachers’ evaluation. For example, teachers and evaluators should be able to look at whether disproportionate discipline incidents are happening in a specific class, for a specific student, or across specific student populations. Based on this data, teachers and evaluators should have honest conversations about ways to improve. They could find trends in the data, brainstorm alternative methods, consider targeted professional development, and find other teachers who have demonstrated ability in this area to observe. The data will facilitate and strengthen these discussions.

Require schools to include a school culture goal on their Comprehensive Educational Plans (CEPs). School leadership teams complete annual CEPs in order to set goals for their schools on a variety of academic metrics. CEPs not only help leaders set a vision and hold themselves accountable, they also serve as a public declaration of a school’s priorities. We believe that requiring all CEPs to include a school culture or climate goal will send an important message about the school’s priorities. Moreover, doing so will help leaders focus on this important aspect, encourage collection of school climate data, and help create accountability for the CEP’s goals.



SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

Expand trainings in Restorative Justice and PBIS practices, de-escalation, adolescent growth and development, and other areas that support positive school culture and nonpunitive approaches to discipline. It is crucial that teachers are genuinely supported in our work to build positive school cultures. Some of us have spent much of our careers with an entirely different approach, so we cannot simply change methods overnight. A new approach needs an infusion of carefully designed, high-quality trainings.

The DOE already offers an array of professional development, including sessions that focus on classroom management.³⁰ We call for an expansion of this training that goes beyond traditional classroom “management” and focuses on creating a positive climate in schools and classrooms, understanding students’ development and perspectives, and de-escalating challenging situations in a collaborative manner.

This new set of professional development sessions should be disseminated widely. A newsletter that specifically shares professional development opportunities on this issue³¹ could be offered alongside an awareness campaign that informs teachers about these new opportunities. Moreover,

there should be a specific page on the DOE’s website that includes options for professional development on school climate.

Teachers who attend these trainings should have the opportunity to receive either hourly compensation or credits toward salary schedule differentials. In addition to partnering with outside organizations that have a proven track record of quality professional development, the DOE should pursue teacher-to-teacher trainings, a practice that Chancellor Carmen Fariña has emphasized.³²

Create, expand, and fund teacher career ladders dedicated to establishing nonpunitive discipline models and positive school cultures. One of the most positive aspects of the most recent New York City teachers’ contract is the inclusion of greater leadership opportunities for teachers. E4E-New York has long advocated for career ladders that recognize teachers’ diverse abilities and reward excellence.³³ We believe that new professional pathways should be created that focus on building positive school climates. Combining career ladders with a focus on school culture makes sense because all schools have talented staff who can share their skills with colleagues.

We envision a diverse set of pathways that leverage teachers' skills and fit schools' unique needs and initiatives. These positions should focus on nonpunitive discipline approaches, and be distinct from deans or other administrators. Teachers in these positions would not be empowered to pass out punishments, such as suspensions or detentions.

Positions could include but not be limited to: school-wide PBIS/RJ coordinator; management and culture instructional coach; management and culture model teacher; parent and student PBIS/RJ coach. Positions could be part-time, meaning a teacher teaches one or two fewer classes; or full-time, meaning a teacher is temporarily out of the classroom. Teachers should be selected based on a demonstrated ability to build staff buy-in and to model positive practices in their classrooms. Since these roles come with additional responsibilities, they should also come with additional compensation.

The career ladder rungs available to a limited number of schools in the current contract—Master Teachers, Model Teachers, and Teacher Ambassadors—can be leveraged to achieve this goal. Doing so successfully would entail more funding and expanded training on building positive school climates. Our hope is that the DOE will expand the availability of these career pathways to the entire district, and continue to develop new professional pathways focusing on school climate.

Prioritize additional training for evaluators and mentors on giving specific feedback related to positive classroom culture building and management techniques. Teachers are not the only ones who will need training. A new approach to discipline needs to be aligned across the entire school system. This includes teacher evaluation, which has already prompted meaningful conversations about improving pedagogy. To move this to the next level, we need to ensure that evaluators are giving teachers feedback on our practice that is in line with positive discipline and climate approaches. We know from research and experience that quality feedback can improve student achievement,³⁴ so there is good reason to believe that it can also improve classroom culture.

In general, trainings for evaluators and mentor teachers should focus on giving concrete, actionable feedback on Domains 2(a), Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport, and 2(d), Managing Student Behavior, from the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching—the observation framework used in New York's teacher evaluation system. Moreover, evaluators should be trained to provide opportunities for teachers to practice positive behavior interventions, through methods such as role-playing or co-observation of effective teachers. More specifically, evaluators at schools that are implementing schoolwide systems such as PBIS and RJ should receive targeted training to ensure that evaluation feedback is aligned to the school's approach.

“Professional development that focuses on classroom management and school culture ought to occur in a series of sessions accompanied with actionable materials to ensure that teachers are understanding, applying, and reflecting. This way, teachers will not only incorporate behavior management systems their schools already have in place, but they will also utilize the new knowledge learned.”

Eufemia A. Nuñez, Language arts teacher and PBIS leader, P.S. K396, District 75

Create a classroom management, school climate, and de-escalation framework that is shared with teacher preparation programs. Relatively few teachers in our survey reported that their teacher preparation program successfully equipped them for the challenges of classroom management. This is in line with our experience, as well as national surveys of teachers for a report on teacher preparation by the American Federation of Teachers.³⁵ Addressing this challenge is of fundamental importance to developing and retaining effective teachers.

There appears to be a disconnect between teacher preparation programs and the districts in which their graduates teach. There is little evidence that the two sides—prep programs and districts—are meaningfully working together. To start to build collaboration, we recommend that the DOE create a classroom management, school climate, and de-escalation framework that is aligned to the DOE's positive vision for school culture and student discipline. Such a framework need not be prescriptive, but should clearly lay out what new teachers are expected to know and be able to do. For example, prospective teachers should be familiar with positive alternatives to suspension, be trained in building relationships with students, understand how to respond to student misbehavior, etc. The exact details of such a framework should be fleshed out in collaboration with teachers, administrators, parents, students, and teacher preparation administrators and professors.

We believe these standards should not be mandated, but highly encouraged. Indeed, the DOE is not in a position to require that such a framework be used, but schools *can* take prospective teachers' knowledge of positive climate practices into consideration during the hiring process. This creates incentives for the use of a coherent framework by prep programs, and also may improve school-based hiring protocol to align with a positive school climate vision. Moreover, creating a framework, disseminating it, and incorporating it into aspects of the hiring process should create meaningful incentives for prep programs to consider full adoption—or at the very least improving current methods.

POLL

My teacher training program gave me the skills I need for effective classroom management.

35%

Agree or Strongly Agree

53%

Disagree or Strongly Disagree

12%

Undecided

Source: E4E-New York internal survey of members, n=212.

ANECDOTE

In my first, fraught year of teaching, I remember dismissal time with my class of first graders generally being one of chaos, anxiety, and stress. I shudder to remember what would happen when it was time to pack up to go home: students could be found crawling around on the floor among the coats and backpacks, shouting, not waiting their turn, pushing ahead of each other, strewing their books and folders around the room, and inevitably someone would end up in tears. I felt powerless to deal with the chaos. Despite my best efforts, I would often find myself shouting at students in frustration, even though I certainly understood that shouting is not an effective behavior management strategy. I just didn't know how to fix what was broken.

I wish I had known then what I know now. I wish that someone had shown me what a difference giving clear, concise, calm directions can make. I wish I had understood how to model and show the students what my expectations were, when simply telling them wasn't enough. I wish I'd known how many times we'd need to repeat and practice our routines together before I could expect students to perform them independently. I wish I had understood how to give them precise praise, not only to acknowledge students who were on track, but also to narrate the positive and let other students understand how to be successful. Classroom management is an essential part of any teacher preparation program because every student deserves a teacher with the skills to run a classroom in a way that makes it a calm, respectful, and positive place.

Mara Dajevskis

Social-studies teacher, P.S. 089 Elmhurst

“Teachers know our schools’ strengths and weaknesses and our students’ struggles and ambitions better than anyone else. Leveraging our expertise and empowering us to transform our school communities is a worthwhile and necessary investment.”

Chris Baribault

Dean of students, P.S./M.S. 043

Provide “effective” and “highly effective” teachers who work at Alternative Learning Centers (ALCs) a salary differential of \$7,500.

Students who commit more serious offenses serve a Superintendent’s suspension for up to one year at one of the 37 DOE-run “Alternate Learning Centers” (ALCs), which are spread across the five boroughs.³⁶ No doubt working in such a school is one of the most difficult teaching jobs in New York City, which likely makes it challenging for those schools to recruit and retain good teachers.³⁷ Of course, many students in ALCs are exactly the ones who most need quality instruction. To support ALCs in attracting and keeping quality educators, we propose a \$7,500 differential for “effective” or “highly effective”³⁸ teachers who work in ALCs. This would apply both to teachers currently in ALCs and to teachers who choose to transfer to an ALC.

Although teachers do not get into teaching for the money,³⁹ there is a consistent body of evidence finding that teachers do respond to changes in compensation. For example, a program in North Carolina awarded certified math, science, and special education teachers a bonus

of approximately \$2,500⁴⁰ for working in high-poverty schools. Estimates found that the additional pay reduced teacher turnover by 12 percent.⁴¹ Similarly, a recent study offered large pay increases (\$20,000) to teachers with demonstrated effectiveness to transfer to low-performing schools. The bonuses resulted in significant student achievement gains.⁴²

We believe that although \$7,500 is not a huge amount of money, it is enough to have some positive effect on teachers’ decision-making. It is also comparable to the \$5,000 hard-to-staff schools differential that was put in place in the City teachers’ contract.⁴³

Finally, we hope that this bonus can serve to attract teachers currently in the system to transfer to ALCs. The DOE should work to recruit teachers by emphasizing the differential, particularly focusing on educators with a track record of using positive forms of discipline in their classrooms and schools (as measured, for example, by scores on subsections 2(a) and 2(d) of the Danielson framework).



SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Establish a minimum school counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250. There are more police officers than school counselors in New York City schools.⁴⁴ This stark truth is one of the most disturbing facts that we discovered in our research for this paper. Not only does this reality have practical effects in schools—which often lack the counselors needed to perform basic requirements⁴⁵—it also serves as a clear signal to students, parents, and teachers of the system’s priorities.

We believe that the DOE must prioritize turning this shameful number on its head, and reduce the school counselor-to-student rate to at least 1:250,⁴⁶ which is the ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.⁴⁷

This is one of our most expensive recommendations, but we believe we cannot afford the continued lack of investment in school counselors, since there is abundant research showing their positive effects on students. One study found that an increase in the number of school counselors significantly reduced student misbehavior and increased student achievement.⁴⁸ Moreover, this study also reported that investing in counselors appeared more cost effective than other reforms, such as class-size reductions.⁴⁹ Other research replicates these results, finding that counselors lead to reductions in discipline issues,⁵⁰ improve teachers’ perceptions of school climate,⁵¹ and reduce repeated offenses, particularly among low-income students of color.⁵²

Every teacher knows that the benefits of school counselors are not only academic, but extend well beyond the classroom. Teachers simply are not equipped or able to do the out-of-classroom work that a high-quality counselor can.

“When dealing with children, our approach must be preventative first and restorative second. A police officer’s role, while preventative to some degree, is largely reactive by nature. The role of counselors in creating a safe space for adolescents to learn to navigate the expectations of school and society is essential.”

Amber Peterson

English language arts and social studies teacher, Innovate Manhattan Charter School

ANECDOTE

A well-trained, compassionate counselor skilled in understanding and responding to student needs should be a prerequisite in any high-needs school. The school in East Harlem where I teach was fortunate enough to bring just such a person onto staff this year. After carefully considering and designing the position, my principal arrived on the title of Crisis Intervention Coordinator, and found the perfect hire. With his background in psychotherapy, social work, and counseling, our counselor has been able to wear a number of different hats at Isaac Newton Middle. He provides one-on-one and small-group interventions, keeps order in our hallways and lunchroom, and connects families with mental health resources within their community. With his broad skill set and bearish good nature, he has been invaluable in effecting change within our adolescents' hearts and minds. Recruiting and retaining such valuable staff members strikes me as perhaps the single most important recommendation I can advocate for in this paper; people like our school's counselor are indispensable field agents in the struggle to reform culture and climate.

Cameron Maxwell

Humanities teacher, Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science

For suspensions lasting more than five days, require that students' reintegration process include a re-entry interview during which an academic and social-emotional plan are created.

When a student is suspended, particularly for an extended period of time, it is crucial that there are supports and expectations set to help prevent further problems when he or she returns to class. We have seen too many instances of students who return from suspensions only to have the same problems repeat themselves. This is not surprising if targeted re-entry plans are not put in place, particularly since suspensions are not intrinsically meaningful and do not communicate to students what they did wrong or how they can improve.

We believe that some recurring issues can be prevented by creating a clear reintegration process for students that

includes, at the very least, an administrator, teacher, and the student. Ideally, the reintegration conference should also include parent(s)/guardian(s) and a school counselor.⁵³ The process should consider school staff's perspectives, but should also actively solicit the student's and his or her parents' points of view—this will only work well if all parties are invested. The process should result in a specific re-entry plan that incorporates academic and social-emotional goals and supports for the student.

A collaborative plan creates mutual accountability for a student and his or her teachers. The plan should be shared with the district superintendent. Furthermore, before additional suspensions for the same student can be instituted, the re-entry plan should be reviewed by the school staff to ensure that the plan has been followed.⁵⁴



Eliminate the principal’s suspension as a possible consequence for a first offense of insubordination (referred to as A22 or B21 in the discipline code) and require multiple, documented guidance interventions before a suspension for A22/B21 can be issued. Among the most controversial aspects of New York City’s Discipline Code are sections A22 (for grades K–5) and B21 (for grades 6–12), which define infractions in subjective terms: “Defying or disobeying the lawful authority or directive of school personnel or school safety agents in a way that substantially disrupts the educational process.”⁵⁵ In grades 4–12, an out-of-school “principal’s suspension” of up to five days may be issued to students who violate A22 or B21.

A22/B21 suspensions are among the most common in New York City,⁵⁶ and research suggests that such subjective offenses tend to have the highest racial disparities.⁵⁷ Moreover, some argue that defying an adult per se should not be sufficient for removal from school, unless the defiance falls into another, more serious category of offenses.

These concerns are well heard, which is why we support eliminating suspensions for first violations of A22 or B21. A student should not face suspension for A22/B21 unless

there has been a previously documented infraction, which received a lower consequence, and multiple guidance interventions, as defined by the Discipline Code⁵⁸, have been attempted and documented. This policy reframes suspension as a last resort—as it should be.

Some argue that suspensions for A22/B21 should be prohibited outright. In fact, Los Angeles’ school district banned suspensions for what it refers to as “willful defiance.”⁵⁹ We are sympathetic to this position, but ultimately decided not to go so far.

First, we simply do not feel comfortable completely tying the hands of school staff to make discipline decisions, particularly in instances when the learning environment is significantly disrupted, which we all know from experience is anything but a minor concern for teachers. Second, we are concerned that banning suspensions outright would simply create de facto suspensions, since the penalty below a principal’s suspension is teacher removal from class. Without the ability to suspend, a teacher might simply remove a student from class multiple times, creating a situation virtually identical to a suspension. Our policy however, creates incentives for using guidance interventions, preventative measures, and positive approaches.

“Suspensions will not cause a defiant or oppositional student to change his or her behavior. Alternative techniques are most likely to allow students to grow and be active members of their communities.”

Seth Kritzman

School counselor, Lower Manhattan Community Middle School

Create a clear process for removing metal detectors in schools by requiring school leadership to actively choose to keep metal detectors every two years. Too many students have to go through metal detectors each day to enter their schools. One analysis found that nearly 100,000 New York City students—disproportionately students of color—passed through metal detectors each day.^{60,61} Of course, in some contexts, these metal detectors must exist in order to keep students and staff safe. However, this must be balanced against the negative effects of metal detectors. Specifically, they can create a negative climate and increase students’ interaction with law enforcement. We are concerned that too many metal detectors exist simply due to inertia rather than a credible threat to school safety.

Metal detectors should be put in place only for a set period of time of no more than two years, in response to a clearly identified concern regarding safety. All metal detectors currently installed should be placed on a similar time line. Once the time period elapses, school leadership teams should assess the metal detectors’ necessity, in consultation with students. If the leadership team elects to maintain the metal detectors due to continued need, the DOE and NYPD should be informed of the decision, along with the time period for when the question will be revisited (which again should be no longer than two years). If the team makes no decision or chooses to remove the metal detectors, the NYPD should immediately begin the process of doing so. Finally the DOE should disseminate protocol for collaboration across school leadership teams when multiple schools on a campus share a single set of metal detectors.

ANECDOTE

At my school, metal detectors were brought in for a random search day. I met students outside to prep them on this unexpected start to their day. Many were worried, asking if something bad happened and that's why the police came. Many normally happy students entered the school with blank faces, afraid of what they might encounter. After the experience, we had a hallway meeting with our seventh graders and asked them how it made them feel. Students said they felt like criminals, and felt like they weren't trusted.

Melissa Kaminski

Special education teacher, Baychester Middle School





TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Feature disaggregated suspension and school climate data on school quality snapshots. The DOE issues school quality snapshots—previously and informally known as school report cards—for its schools. These snapshots include crucial information on academic progress and achievement, school environment surveys, achievement gaps,^{62,63} and college readiness (for high schools).⁶⁴ The school environment surveys are particularly beneficial for determining which schools are successfully creating safe and welcoming communities. However, these snapshots lack crucial information about school climate, specifically disaggregated data on suspensions and discipline incidents. The DOE should add this information to school quality snapshots.

This simple change would emphasize the importance of school climate to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. School staff would know that part of their school’s evaluation is based on how successfully they prevent discipline incidents and suspensions. Indeed, there is evidence that struggling schools improve in response to school quality snapshots.^{65,66,67} Parents would have the ability to carefully consider climate data when deciding which school will be the right fit for their child. Furthermore, transparency on school quality snapshots is in line with our general perspective, which promotes public accountability.

Require schools struggling with climate to establish and use a schoolwide system for improving culture. A small number of New York City schools account for a disproportionate share of the district’s discipline and climate issues.⁶⁸ Schools that continue to struggle with these issues and have high rates of suspensions must make significant changes in order to improve. Support and resources are part of this solution, as many of our previous recommendations emphasize, but we would go one step further and mandate that struggling schools implement schoolwide systems of discipline.

This recommendation is based on a model used in Los Angeles, due to a 2013 school board resolution, which requires that all schools in the district use schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS).⁶⁹ This policy has appeared to cause a reduction in suspensions across the district.⁷⁰ We would not go as far as Los Angeles in mandating that all schools implement such a policy. After all, many schools have their own methods that are effective, and PBIS is not the only schoolwide model. However, autonomy should come with accountability.

We would also adopt another part of Los Angeles’ policy for schools identified as struggling with school climate: the creation of a confidential online portal for community members—including parents, students, and teachers—to report violations of the schoolwide PBIS policy, which

“More transparency regarding the quality of ALCs is essential in aiding reintegration. Parents and teachers need to know what a student is experiencing to be able to respond proactively and support them during their time away and upon their return.”

Caitlin Biello

Special education and global history teacher, Kappa International High School

should go directly to district offices.^{71,72} The purpose of this portal is to provide a way to hold schools accountable and to allow genuine community voice.⁷³ The Los Angeles portal allows complaints such as “Parents are not part of the implementation efforts for schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support,” “Alternatives to suspension are not used with students,” and “The school does not share student discipline data with the school community.”⁷⁴

Finally, schools that are required to implement new policies must be given support, including resources, training, and money, to do so. Schools must be held accountable, but this must also come with meaningful investment.

Institute school quality reports and quality reviews for ALCs. There is very little public information about the quality of instruction that suspended students receive in ALCs. In fact the only information available on the DOE website consists of two paragraphs briefly describing ALCs⁷⁵ and a directory of schools.⁷⁶ ALCs do not receive quality reviews or quality snapshots.

DOE staff report that instructional quality has significantly improved in recent years,⁷⁷ and the website states that schools use PBIS alongside restorative discipline approaches.⁷⁸ This is encouraging, and we certainly do not doubt that the DOE and the staff at ALCs are making real

efforts to provide quality education in these challenging circumstances. However, student advocates report decidedly mixed experiences, and other anecdotal reports⁷⁹ suggest cause for concern about the quality of ALCs.

We believe that the first step to strengthening ALCs is improving transparency. We recommend creating quality snapshots and instituting quality reviews, published online, just as other DOE schools are required to do. This will increase accountability, provide meaningful feedback to the schools, and ensure that parents have genuine information about the school their children attend.⁸⁰ This recommendation is backed by research about New York City’s school quality reports, suggesting that they can serve as a catalyst for struggling schools to improve.^{81,82,83}

Quality reports and reviews should be different for ALCs than for other schools. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe what they should look like, but we recommend that the DOE’s school accountability arm should work with ALC staff to create appropriate performance metrics. ALCs face unique challenges, and any quality report or review should recognize as much.

SCHOOL SAFETY AGENTS

School Safety Agents (SSAs) are police officers employed by the NYPD to provide “security and safety” in New York City schools.⁸⁴ Some have raised concerns recently about SSAs’ role in arresting students and creating negative climates in schools.⁸⁵ This is a legitimate concern, though there is room for optimism. Our survey of teachers found that the majority believe that SSAs were a positive presence in their schools; relatedly, only a minority felt that SSAs unnecessarily escalated student discipline issues. Moreover, arrests in schools have dropped precipitously in recent years.⁸⁶ That said, the training, use, and accountability of SSAs could benefit from several common-sense changes:

- **Increase DOE’s role in SSAs’ pre-service training.** Currently SSAs receive little pre-service training from DOE staff that is designed to ensure that SSAs understand their roles in the context of a larger school community. Training should focus on building positive relationships with students and ensuring that SSAs are aligned with the DOE’s vision for positive school climates. Ideally, some part of the training will be school-based, with the leadership from the school where the SSA will serve.
- **Create a memorandum of understanding between DOE and NYPD that empowers principals to make all discipline-related decisions in schools.** It is crucial that principals have control over their schools. If a principal and SSA disagree on the appropriate course of action, the principal’s view should supercede.
- **Prohibit SSAs from arresting students unless they are a genuine threat to public safety.** This common-sense policy would ensure that arrests happen only when necessary.
- **Track the number of arrests performed by individual SSAs; evaluate and hold accountable SSAs with disproportionate numbers of arrests (relative to school settings).** SSAs who have consistent track records of disproportionate numbers of arrests should be evaluated, provided additional training, and ultimately dismissed if unable to improve.

POLL

**School safety officers
are a positive presence
in my school.**

62%

Agree or
Strongly Agree

15%

Disagree or
Strongly
Disagree

23%

Undecided

**School safety officers
often and unnecessarily
escalate situations
in my school.**

9%

Agree or
Strongly Agree

73%

Disagree or
Strongly
Disagree

18%

Undecided

Source: E4E-New York internal survey of members, n=212.

“My school’s SSA is fully integrated into our school culture. She is a vital member of the community and is committed to positive behavior systems. Our students see her as a resource, an ally, and a role model. All schools deserve committed, well-trained SSAs like ours.”

Maura Henry, ESL teacher, The Young Women’s Leadership School of Astoria

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of our recommendations are at the district level because local-level reform is the best lever for improving the culture in schools. However, New York State law has an important role to play as well, particularly in the areas of spurring innovation and increasing transparency.

Create a competitive grant program to incentivize schools and districts to use innovative approaches to school climate.

In general, we have found too little innovation in the area of improving school climate and student discipline. The traditional model of discipline is simple and continues to be followed in many schools: teachers are expected to manage student behavior; if they cannot, students are sent out of class, and often suspended. This persists despite the fact that most teachers in our survey report both that suspensions are ineffective consequences, and that their schools could benefit from more systematic approaches. Certain innovative approaches exist—such as restorative justice—but we think it is crucial to expand these new ideas.

It is so important for schools and districts to be incentivized to create novel methods for improving school culture. We believe that many schools and districts want to try something new but simply don't have the time or money to do so successfully. Funding new ideas will not only help specific schools and districts that want to

innovate, it will also expand policymakers' and educators' body of knowledge on this topic.

We envision the creation of a state-administered competitive grant program that funds new techniques for improving student discipline. This might include an innovative technique for using data, a more effective method of training teachers, a way to empower parents and students, or a unique school- or districtwide approach. The grant could be awarded to a program that has been running for some time, but lacks funding and recognition, or it could be awarded to a new idea crafted by a group of teachers.

We imagine this grant program operating in two rounds. First, a round of funding should be awarded based on the promise, novelty, and thoroughness of a given plan. A second round of funding should be based on evidence of success of the program (including suspension, academic, and school survey data). This will incentivize programs to collect and disseminate measures of success, and ensure that the grant program is focused on what is working.

“Imagine a world where credentials signify proven skills and capabilities. In this world, teacher preparation programs are in part measured by teacher outcomes; that is, what they’ve achieved instructionally and culturally for our city’s students. It’s hard to justify to students and families why this isn’t the world we currently live in.”

Cole Farnum, Instructional leader and middle school math teacher,
Williamsburg Collegiate Charter School

LOOKING TO OTHER STATES

The Los Angeles Unified School District requires each school to produce a Student Discipline Data Report,⁸⁷ which includes the number of suspensions, the reasons for suspensions, and the number of instructional days lost due to suspension. This data is broken down by race, ELL-status, poverty, disability status, and gender. It is also available based on the reason for the suspension. Moreover, arrest data is available based on the type of alleged crime, as well as race and gender.

Require the public release of school-level climate data disaggregated by demographics and infractions, including rates of suspensions, number of students suspended, and frequency of school arrests. It is an absolute necessity that data on suspensions and arrests be made publicly available at the school level. Without this data, we cannot know the extent of the problem or where to target support and resources. New York City has required schools to report the number of school suspensions, arrests, and summonses disaggregated by gender, race, and age.⁸⁸ This was an important step, but more work is still necessary: the New York City law does not require transparency in the number of students suspended. This means that although schools report the number of suspensions, it's impossible to tell whether that number was clustered around a few students or spread out across the entire school. Moreover, suspension data appears to be even less transparent for schools outside New York City.

To solve this problem, there should be a statewide law requiring all New York public schools—including public charter schools—to report full suspension, expulsion, and arrest data, disaggregated by race, gender, age, and special education status, and broken down by offense. This data should include both the number of suspensions and the number of students suspended. It should be made publicly available and easily accessible on NYSED's website, as well as individual schools' sites.

Require teacher preparation programs to survey graduates on how well they were prepared to build classroom culture and publicly release the results. Relatively few teachers in our survey felt prepared for the challenges of creating class climates that are conducive to learning, and many teachers continue to struggle with student behavior in their classrooms.

To some extent, it is understandable that new teachers struggle with this aspect of teaching. At the same time, teacher preparation programs are not doing nearly enough to prepare teachers to create a positive climate in their classroom and schools. A review of teacher preparation programs found inconsistent teaching of research-based classroom-management techniques, and few opportunities to explicitly practice theoretical teaching.⁸⁹ Our experiences also suggest that there is a dearth of practical training in creating supportive classroom and school climates.

State law should require all institutions that certify teachers to survey their graduates on whether they have been effectively taught classroom-management techniques. This is in line with a previous E4E–New York paper on teacher preparation, which recommends that teacher preparation programs annually survey alumni.⁹⁰

There would be multiple benefits in having data on classroom readiness. First, preparation programs themselves would be able to use it to see what they are doing well and where they need to improve. Second, it would reveal patterns to help identify the training most needed among prospective teachers. Third, it would offer a degree of external accountability for preparation programs, by allowing potential students to see which institutions are genuinely preparing teachers for the rigors of the classroom.

CONCLUSION

New York City students and teachers deserve schools that are safe, supportive, non-exclusionary, and conducive to learning. We know that positive school climate is possible through a combination of support and resources, transparency and accountability, innovation and research. Our students cannot wait for safe, supportive schools. As professionals, we can no longer accept that our colleagues leave our schools with the highest needs, or leave the profession altogether, due to climate issues. Our state cannot afford—either morally or financially—reactive safety policies that truncate students’ options for self-advancement and interpret cries for help as criminality.

There appears to be widespread agreement that we can do better: civil rights and parent organizations are demanding better, and so are teachers’ unions.⁹¹ In collaboration with students, parents, teachers, and administrators, our city must double down on its investment to create healthy school climates. Together we can, should, and will get this right.

NOTES

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- ⁵⁸ The discipline code provides the following examples of guidance interventions: "Parent outreach; Intervention by counseling staff; Guidance conference(s); Restorative Approaches; Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS); Individual/group counseling; Peer mediation; Mentoring program; Conflict Resolution; Development of individual behavior contract; Short-term behavioral progress reports; Referral to PPT (Pupil Personnel Team); Community service (with parental consent); Referral to a Community Based Organization (CBO); Referral to appropriate substance abuse counseling services; Referral to counseling services for youth relationship abuse or sexual violence; Referral to counseling services for bias-based bullying, intimidation, or harassment; Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)/ Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)
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- ⁷¹ Los Angeles Unified School District. Discipline Foundation Policy Online Complaint Form. Retrieved from <https://dfpcomplaint.lausd.net/>
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- ⁷³ Special care should be taken to ensure that all families—regardless of home language spoken or access to technology—can access this portal. This can be done through translation services, the ability to use school computers to access the portal, and the option to make complaints through hard copy forms, available at schools. The district should also explore additional options to ensure accessibility of this program.
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- ⁷⁹ Sussman, A. L. (2011, May 6). Suspension Trap. *The Progressive*. Retrieved from <http://www.progressive.org/news/2011/05/161906/suspension-trap>
- ⁸⁰ It is important to note that suspended students do not have the choice of which schools to attend, so quality snapshots will not serve the purpose of facilitating school choice. However, we still believe that transparent school report cards are necessary for ensuring public accountability regarding the quality of ALCs' instruction.
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- ⁸³ As previously mentioned, it is important to note that the DOE's revised quality snapshots do not include summative letter grades. It will be crucial to monitor the efficacy of these new reports both for ALCs and other DOE schools.
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