

Public Education: Behavioral Discipline Policies in Public Schools

Position Statement Approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

Issue/Concern: The current implementation of school discipline management policies negatively impacts society by increasing the chances that students referred to disciplinary programs will not graduate from high school. Schools are losing more than one third of their students from their enrollment prior to graduation. High school graduation rates affect everyone, because not having a high school diploma has been linked to an increased probability that a person will need social welfare services, and/or will commit a crime. While ensuring that public schools are a safe place for learning is of paramount importance, it is equally important that the programs in place that deal with disruptive students preserve school safety and meet the child's needs educationally and emotionally.

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- ★ Increase professional development training and support for teachers / administration regarding discipline management and cultural competency as part of required continuing education.
- ★ Create a process of accountability for reviewing / evaluating students of referrals, including the percentage of students, demographics, benchmarks, and reason for referrals.
- ★ Include behavior management in teacher certification requirements for alternative certifications.
- ★ Allocate resources to TEA, including funds and staff, to provide oversight and accountability.

How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services? Houston Independent School District has a 50% graduation rate, and more than a third of all Texas public school students do not graduateⁱ. The 2007 class of high school dropouts in Texas will cost state taxpayers \$377 million this year and every year thereafter, over the course of their lifetime. Each of the state's estimated 119,000 annual dropouts costs the state about \$3,168 every year for the rest of their lives because of increased Medicaid costs, increased incarceration costs, and loss of tax revenueⁱⁱ.

Students who have been referred to alternative education disciplinary programs have five times the dropout rate of mainstream programs^{iv}. Approximately one-half of all classroom time is taken up with activities other than instruction and discipline problems are responsible for a significant portion of this lost instructional time (Cotton 1990). High dropout rates can be prevented when school administrations implement policy procedures that support the interest of the student and safety of the school. Discipline management training for teachers and administrations would provide positive behavior management skills, and decrease referrals and/or expulsions. When teachers are equipped with discipline management skills, they are able to prevent negative behaviors from occurring, recurring and/or escalating.

Oversight policies increase safeguards to the public through clear accountability, increased transparency, and public representation. As a result of internal and external pressures that fall upon school administrators, it can be difficult to ensure that the rights of all students are protected in discipline hearings and actions. Oversight of discipline procedures may assist in compliance and awareness of provisions, as well as prevent unnecessary discretionary referrals.

Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

- ★ Only 65% of Texas students graduate from high school; Texas has a 35% attrition rate in public schools ^v
- ★ According to data posted by the Texas Education Agency, school districts sent 613, 549 students to Out-of-School-Suspension, and more than 1.7 million to In-School-Suspension in 2005-2006^{vi}.

ⁱ CHILDREN AT RISK

ⁱⁱ Texas AppleSeed "School to Prison Pipeline"

ⁱⁱⁱ Friedman Foundation "The High Cost of Failing to Reform Public Education in Texas

^{iv} Texas Education Agency, 2006 COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL REPORT ON TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A REPORT TO THE 80TH LEGISLATURE FROM THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY 54 (2006).

^v Intercultural Development Research Association (2008)

^{vi} Texas AppleSeed, School-to-Prison Pipeline

Contact: Mandi Kimball at 713.869.7740 or mkimball@childrenatrisk.org