

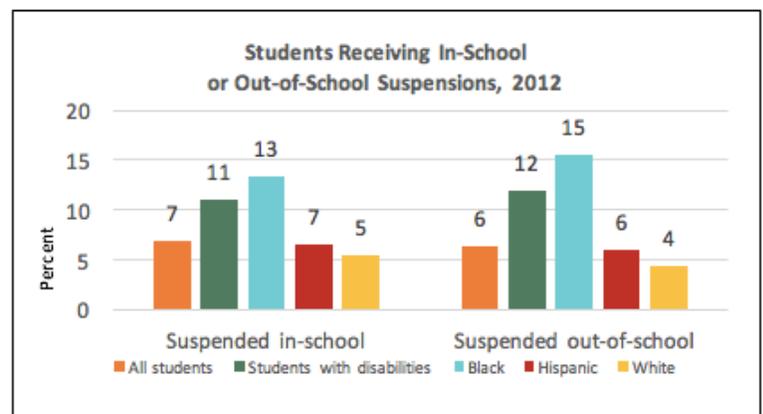


A Critical Look at School Discipline Policies

School discipline policies have gone through a great deal of reforms over the last twenty years. Currently, there is a broad call for moving away from the use of exclusionary discipline, or the removal a student from their normal education setting. Most of the research refers specifically to the negative effects of suspensions from school.

According to the American Institute for Research, which specializes in behavioral and social science research and evaluation, suspensions have been linked to serious negative outcomes for students. Some of the **consequences include increased likelihood to repeat a grade, not graduate, or be vulnerable to the “school to prison pipeline”**, or the relationships between students being excluded from school and the juvenile justice system.

Both across the nation and in D.C., suspensions from school disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities. In the U.S., Black students are 3-4 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers, and students with disabilities are two times more likely. **In D.C., the disparity is even more stark: Black students are more than seven times more likely to be suspended.**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2015 Digest of Education Statistics

New School Discipline Bill Under Review

Councilmember David Grosso proposed The Student Fair Access to School Act in 2017 in an effort to address the disparities in suspension rates and put pressure on schools to find alternatives to exclusionary discipline. The bill limits the number of school days a student can be suspended, the type of offenses that may warrant a suspension, and pushes schools to adopt positive behavior and restorative justice practices.

While in theory the bill may seem to help D.C. schools move towards a more positive and equitable discipline system, **the bill misses on a number of critical components to reducing suspension rates and disparities across subgroups.** Existing now as an unfunded mandate, the bill **limits school leaders’ options in providing consequences without providing any real alternatives or support to train staff on positive interventions or restorative practices.** Schools already have strict reporting requirements, but this bill does little else to address the biases that cause disproportionate rates in suspensions. The School District of Philadelphia implemented a similar policy without additional funding or resources, and according to a study done by the Fordham Institute, prompted disappointing results. There was little to no effect on total suspensions or academic achievement.

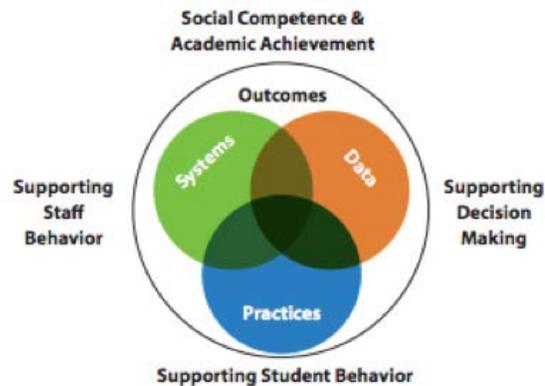
Additionally, parents look to schools to have a unique mission and vision for education when looking for the right school for their child. What works for one child, might not work for another, and parents need real choice in order to find the best fit. By attempting to implement uniform discipline policies, this bill forces schools to adjust their vision and the environment they have worked hard to create for students and their families.



What Will It Take to Improve School Discipline Models?

Shifting towards preventative and restorative practices requires a **citywide commitment and investment**. To do this right, schools need:

- extensive **training** and ongoing **professional development** for school staff to learn how to implement new models
- **evidence based programs** like PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions in Schools) and restorative justice programs
- increased **support services staff**, including mental and behavioral health counselors and social workers, particularly in our schools serving students living in poverty or students who have experienced trauma or homelessness.
- **accurate data from an extensive study** to identify what practices are successful and what practices need rethinking and help inform future investments



Source: www.pbis.org

What Will the Investments Cost?

The proposed legislation offers no funding to schools to implement these types of changes. Preventative and restorative programs are expensive, and we need to ensure schools have the capacity to access the resources and support the need.

Resource	Estimated Cost
PBIS Program	\$5,000-10,000/school
Districtwide Professional Development	\$500,000+
Additional Support Services Staff	\$2 million+

We need to call on Councilmember Grosso and the Committee on Education to amend this bill because until we have all of the pieces we need to successfully implement it, we could make things for our kids worse instead of better. In order to make sure that every student is attending a school where they are safe, supported, and valued, this legislation needs to include real investments in students, staff, and systems.

Learn More:

- ❖ Read about possibilities and challenges when creating change in *The Atlantic's* "Will School Discipline Reform Actually Change Anything?" <http://theatlantic.com/2rwyscD>
- ❖ Read about D.C.'s need for investment across six areas, including restorative justice programs, in *The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute's* latest update <http://bit.ly/2DqwiD>