

POSITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

National PTA supports positive school discipline policies that keep children in school and learning over exclusionary discipline policies (suspension and expulsion) that tends to exacerbate a child's behavior problems by pushing students out of the place (school) created to support them and keep them safe. Effective, fair and consistently implemented discipline practices promote student learning, address the cause of a student's misbehavior and improve positive behavior skills and overall student and school success. National PTA believes that exclusionary discipline practices should only be used in schools as a last resort effort to preserve the safety of students and staff.

Overly punitive discipline policies—including zero tolerance policies and automatic suspension and/or expulsion—are not effective in addressing or improving student behavior. Rather, recent research has revealed that such policies contribute to a host of negative consequences including an increase in problem behavior and engagement in risky and dangerous behavior, a less positive school climate, decreased academic achievement, increased risk of dropout and involvement in the juvenile justice system. However, a 2014 report, analyzing the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), shows an increase of schools documenting the use of exclusionary discipline in schools, especially for students of color and students with special needs compared to their white counterparts.¹

An issue of increasing scrutiny and focus is the interaction between law enforcement officials in schools—typically referred to as School Resource Officers (SROs)—and students. National PTA defers to local collaborative decision-making to allow for the presence of law enforcement deployed in community-oriented policing within schools. National PTA believes that if a decision is made to have an SRO within a school building, there must be a clearly defined memorandum of understanding, as recommended by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), between the law enforcement agency and the school on the role of the SRO.

National PTA supports positive school discipline practices that are timely, appropriate and fair for each student based on their violation of school rules. School discipline practices need to do more than react to behavioral symptoms, but instead address a student's situational and behavioral motivation, and seek to prevent future disciplinary incidents. Optimum learning and growth occur with an individualized approach. Research has shown that students can benefit from personalized behavior modification plans as well. By addressing behavioral issues on an individualized basis—instead of in the context of a pre-arranged set of sanctions—principals, teachers, school counselors and other school officials have the ability to address each student with a proactive plan for behavior modification instead of punishment.

National PTA recognizes the important role parents, principals, teachers and other school personnel play in promoting positive school discipline policies for all students. National PTA urges its members at all levels to support policies that:

- Replace exclusionary discipline whenever possible with evidence-based, multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) that improve school climate and safety.
- Support policies to limit the duration of in and out of school suspensions and provide a framework in which the student can remain current with their educational program.
- Regularly examine school district discipline policies and procedures, and their impact on all groups of students.
- Require school districts to provide adequate training for all teachers, principals and school personnel on prevention and school-based interventions and alternatives to exclusionary discipline, including PBIS and Response to Intervention (RTI).
- Provide students and their parents' information about the school's disciplinary policies and allow their voices to be heard throughout the disciplinary process.
- Ensure adequate access to and retention of school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists to implement school-based interventions that promote positive school discipline.

Lastly, National PTA recommends that if a community opts to deploy a law enforcement official within a school building, policies must:

- Ensure that schools and law enforcement agencies have a clear and concise memorandum of understanding that defines the role of the school resource officer (SRO).
- Require SROs to be carefully selected and receive specialized training on students with special needs, adolescent development, de-escalation techniques and conflict resolution.
- Prohibit SROs from becoming involved in formal school discipline situations that are the responsibility of school administrators.

Adopted: by the 2016 Board of Directors

¹ U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights
Civil Rights Data Collection
Issue Brief No. 1 (March 2014) www.ocrdata.ed.gov