



New York State Education Department

School Safety Task Force

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On July 30th, 2021, the New York State Education Department, **Safe Schools Task Force** met again to promote dialogue with equal voices and perspectives to seek consensus for recommendations for safer schools. A recap of the April 3, 2021, Task Force worked on **School Discipline Reform** recognizing that the prevalence of school discipline associated with exclusion and the research and trends in school discipline policy, needed advanced reforms. Previously discussed was the prevalence of harming school discipline at the student and school levels and civil rights data and seminal research supporting the need for school discipline reform.

Research on school discipline reform, suspension and climate, academic and behavioral consequences, leave us to rethink universal suspension for severe student behavior. The NYC Department of Education presenters, Mark Rampersant, Holly Bedwell and Keyatte Reid, spoke about interventions. These interventions are embedded in the school climate initiatives in schools, such as **restorative practices** and **social and emotional learning**. These reforms must start with adults and be part of the entire school community and be part of the process. The presentation focused on the implementation of discipline reforms needed to adopt less punitive disciplinary policies and promote the use of supports and intervention, building a capacity that will give staff and students the tools and training to improve student behavior.

The steps that the State Education Department Task Force can take is to understand the information and use it for reform school discipline in New York State. State Education needs to support professional development in SEL, trauma, classroom management, supporting students with IEP's, understanding the impact of discipline and alternatives to discipline, implicit bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and there is a need to have difficult conversations about discipline and students. Additional supports are understanding behavioral supports and interventions. Schools need to know what supports are available for teachers and have a better collaboration between organizations and agencies.

A review of the National Framework for Discipline Reform looked at, the National Association of School Psychologists framework for effective school discipline, the framework for increasing Equity in School Districts (Gregory, Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017), the 2011 U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice collaboration to develop Supportive School Discipline Initiatives, Civil Rights Data Collection, the Education Department and Health & Human Services release policy statement on suspensions and expulsions in Early Childhood Settings, the 2014 ED-DOJ release School Discipline Guidance Package and guiding principles within the USDE

framework from a review of the literature and from information from Federal partners, who work with Safe and Successful Schools. The Task Force looked at the *Guiding Principles: Improving School Climate Resources Guide*, from the U.S. Department of Education.

In determining priority areas in New York for reform, the School Safety Task Force guiding principle are to improve school climate and discipline. Climate and prevention improvements can be met by engaging in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates, prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, promoting social and emotional learning, providing regular training and support to all school personnel on how to engage students and supporting positive behavior. Other guiding principles can support the collaboration with local mental health, child welfare, law enforcement, juvenile justice agencies and other stakeholders, to align resources, use prevention strategies and intervention services and ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers' roles, focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.

Additional guiding principles are to provide clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences, by setting elevated expectations for behavior and adopting an instructional approach to school discipline. It is necessary to involve families, students, and school personnel in the implementation of discipline policies or codes of conduct. Schools must ensure that clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences are applied for misbehavior. It is necessary to create policies that include appropriate procedures for students with disabilities and due process for all students. Students should be removed from the classroom only as a last resort and schools need to ensure that NY alternative settings provide students with academic instruction and return students to their regular class as soon as possible.

Guiding principles must include equity and continued improvement. Schools need to train all school staff to apply school discipline policy and practice a fair and equitable manner of discipline that does not disproportionality impact students of color, students with disabilities or other students at risk for dropout, trauma, or social exclusion. It is important to use proactive data-driven and continuous feedback from families, students, teachers, and school personnel to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences.