

Resolution 1617R-005

By Directors Bonds and Harris

WHEREAS, The U.S. Department of Education has released a 37-page document, entitled "Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline," which sets forth the following three guiding principles for policymakers, district officials, school leaders, and stakeholders to consider as they work to improve school climate and discipline:

- (1) the creation of positive climates and focus on prevention;
- (2) the development of clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and
- (3) the assurance of fairness, equity, and continuous improvement; and

WHEREAS, One of the action steps that this document provides as a means of achieving these goals is to "[r]emove students from the classroom only as a last resort, ensure that any alternative settings provide students with academic instruction, and return students to their regular class as soon as possible"; and

WHEREAS, The body of evidence that tough discipline policies are ineffective, and even counter-productive, continues to grow; and

WHEREAS, Removing troubled students from school through suspensions often leads to their becoming involved in even more trouble; and

WHEREAS, Suspensions from school alienate children and increase the likelihood they will become involved in drugs or gangs or be arrested; and

WHEREAS, Research has shown that even one out-of-school suspension can derail a student's academic achievement, while in districts, such as Broward County, that have piloted alternative disciplinary practices, graduation rates often rise and arrest rates fall; and

WHEREAS, There is no research that indicates that students who have been suspended come back more engaged and ready to learn; and

WHEREAS, Research shows that districts disproportionately suspend minority students and also punish them more harshly than they do their white peers for the same behaviors; and

WHEREAS, The over-use, or even abuse, of out-of-school suspensions is thought to be an outgrowth of zero-tolerance policies toward crime that developed in the 1980s, which led to a mindset that caused minor infractions to become criminalized; and

WHEREAS, Although they are intimately connected, student discipline should not take precedence over student achievement; and

WHEREAS, To help troubled students, it is necessary to uncover and to address the root causes of their bad behavior; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Administration be directed to explore alternatives or enhancements to MPS's current disciplinary programs in light of the U.S. Department of Education's "Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline," especially as they relate to the elimination of out-of-school suspensions; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That Administration also be directed to investigate other districts' innovative disciplinary practices, such as those instituted in the Broward County and Miami-Dade school districts, as they relate to the elimination of out-of-school suspensions; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Administration be directed to consider, but not limit itself to, the following features of these alternative disciplinary programs:

- in-school suspensions, which allow students to remain in school, but separate them from their normal classes while pursuing their coursework;
- the creation of “Success Centers” where students who, in extreme cases, have been given out-of-school suspensions would have supervised access to computers, teachers, and counselors, so that they can keep up with their school work;
- lessons in character development, which would highlight a different trait, such as citizenship or cooperation, each month;
- the use of attendance records and other student data to identify students who might need extra support and to enroll them into smaller classes with selected teachers and additional counselors to closely monitor their individual progress;
- implementation of an extra “service learning” curriculum that would on community work and self-reflection; and
- expansion of restorative justice programs that focus on small groups that bring together students, including the offenders and their victims, to address and resolve problems; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That, in doing its research and compiling its recommendations, the Administration seek, to the fullest extent possible, the input of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, such as

- school leadership,
- community-based and faith-based organizations,
- local colleges and universities,
- student-advocacy groups,
- the PTA and other parent groups, and
- local mental health, child welfare, law enforcement, and juvenile justice agencies; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Administration bring back to the Board, via its Committee on Accountability, Finance, and Personnel, its findings and recommendations regarding alternative disciplinary practices no later than May 2017 for implementation to begin in the 2017-18 school year; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That, prior to issuing its final report with recommendations in May 2017, the Administration provide the Board and the public with periodic (but not fewer than bi-monthly) updates on its progress via the Board’s Committee on Accountability, Finance, and Personnel.