Ending Early Elementary Suspensions in Maryland Schools

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Problem

• Zero-tolerance policies were originally created to deal with drug and weapons violations in schools.
• Out-of-school suspension and expulsion were saved as a consequence for the most serious issues.
• Policies expanded, and students were suspended for less serious issues.
• Research shows that suspending students has detrimental effects on both educational and life outcomes for students:
  - Lower academic performance, higher rates of dropout, failure to graduate, increased academic disengagement, and subsequent disciplinary exclusions.
  - There is no evidence that suspension practices make schools safer.
  - Compounded negative effect when students are suspended in the early years.
• School records follow students, making it easier to pre-judge students.
• Difficult to exit the suspension cycle.

Findings

In 2014-2015, Maryland schools out-of-school suspended, or expelled, 2,926 of its youngest students—kindergarten to grade three.
• This was 11.5 percent of the total number of students suspended or expelled across all school grades.
• In this same school year, students with disabilities equaled about 12 percent of the total population; however, they accounted for approximately 26 percent of the suspensions.
• In 2014, Maryland schools ended the use of zero-tolerance discipline policies.
• However, this policy does not address the age/grade of the students being suspended.

Proposal

• Policies expanded, and students were suspended for less serious issues.
• Research shows that suspending students has detrimental effects on both educational and life outcomes for students:

Students experience poorer outcomes

Students caught in suspension cycle

Students in suspension

Zerosum rules created

Expanded to less serious issues

What Schools Need

• Professional development for educators on classroom strategies that deal with behavioral challenges.
• High-quality, school-wide PBIS models, which use evidence-based interventions at all three tiers:
  - First tier: behavioral expectations are established and taught to all students;
  - Second tier: students needing additional support are offered group level interventions; and
  - Third tier: students needing significant support for behavioral challenges are provided individualized, evidence-based interventions.
• Training and support for implementing the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA).
• A review of restorative justice practices looks promising, so implementing these practices may be valuable.
• For students with the most significant challenging behavior, schools need to work on strengthening their collaboration with parents and mental health providers, which ideally would be school-based services.

What Research Supports

• Research Association, Montreal, Quebec.

References:


The following states have recently set precedents by enacting legislation to end early elementary suspension:
• Effective January 2015 California enacted law AB 420, which eliminates in-school and out-of-school suspensions for disruptive behavior for students in kindergarten through third grade.
• Effective July 2015 Connecticut passed SB 1053, which banned school suspensions for students in pre-kindergarten through second grade.
• Effective July 2015 Oregon limited the circumstances when students in grades kindergarten through five can receive an out-of-school suspension, or expulsion, to incidents when a student causes serious physical injury to another student or staff member, when the student’s behavior poses a direct threat to health or safety, or when required by federal law.
• Effective September 2016 New Jersey prohibits all suspension and expulsion of pre-kindergarten students and all out-of-school suspensions for students in kindergarten through second grade.

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