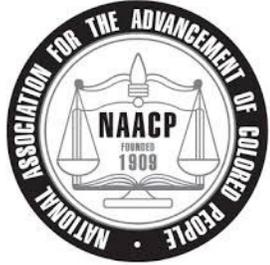


Dear Educator,

This letter is part of a combined effort of ACLU of Michigan, NAACP, Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service, Student Advocacy Center ("SAC") – with its collaborative projects Student Rights Project and Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan –, 482Forward, and Street Democracy to assist schools in the implementation of the "Rethink Discipline" bills that end zero tolerance in Michigan. We would like to offer our coalition's significant expertise in code of conduct revisions, tools to implement the law, professional development, youth leadership, and individual case problem-solving and advocacy.



The passage of the "Rethink Discipline" bills presents a wonderful opportunity to change the culture of discipline in our schools. Michigan has joined many other states that have revised their laws in response to overwhelming research documenting the harm of zero tolerance. Many administrators have shared with us their frustration with mandatory expulsions, recognizing that long-term removals have devastating impacts on school achievement, dropout rates, school climate, perceptions of safety, and future involvement in the criminal justice system. Now that Michigan no longer has one of the harshest school discipline codes in the country, administrators are no longer required to permanently remove students for technical, minor, and unintentional violations of the school's code of conduct.

Among other reforms, the "Rethink Discipline" laws:

- End state-mandated expulsions for everything except possession of a firearm with intent to use – *MCL 380.1310d(2)-(3)*
- Require 7 factors to be considered before all suspensions and expulsions, except possession of a firearm with intent to use, including considering alternatives to suspension – *MCL 380.1310d(1)*
- Create a rebuttable presumption that, absent consideration of all 7 factors, expulsions and suspensions for more than 10 days are not justified – *MCL 380.1310d(2)*
- Require districts to consider the use of restorative practices, and for certain issues, as their "first consideration" – *MCL 380.1310c(1)-(2)*
- Create a rebuttable presumption against expulsion of a student who has no prior suspensions or expulsions and possessed a dangerous weapon if the student can prove one of three exceptions – *MCL 380.1311(3)*
- Redefine expulsions as exclusion for 60 days or more and suspensions to fewer than 60 days – *MCL 380.1310d(5)(a) & (c)*

Through your diligence and commitment to "Rethink Discipline", you can help to reshape the culture of discipline in a way that protects school safety, ensures fairness, remedies harm, and reinforces positive behavior. This will require revisions to student handbooks and codes of conduct. It will also require school board members, administrators, and teachers to be educated and trained on what is now required under the law and how to best interpret and implement the changes.

We ask that you consider taking the following steps:

- Involve students, parents, teachers and community agencies in this work. Consider asking for support from your county's School Justice Partnership team; your ISD should be able to point you in the right direction.
- Adopt Michigan's Model School Code Policy, which emphasizes restorative practices, proper due process protections, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Many of our organizations are available to consult.

- Personalize your own “Lesser Interventions Checklist” for your district. *Download at <https://goo.gl/15InbR>.*
- Use SAC’s “7 Factor Worksheet” to help you think through and document disciplinary decisions. *Download at <https://goo.gl/eYcJR5>.*
- Commit to ongoing professional development and coaching. We know that many of the education associations and intermediate school districts have been providing some of this training for their members, which is great. We also have ideas for you.
- Focus on relationship-building in your schools. Frequent classroom community-building circles, greeting students by name, celebrating good behavior, involving students in classroom and school rules and decisions, and teaching social-emotional skills proactively are all steps that will prevent disciplinary incidents.
- Commit to regular data collection and review with your board and staff. Data will help you target additional resources and support.
- End all 180-day removals (except for possession of firearm with intent to use), implement a 60-day removal maximum, and give students educational services during removal. See <http://www.studentadvocacycenter.org/policy/rethink/>.

Our state can and will do better – and we are here to help. It is our hope that you, as stewards of our education system, will view Michigan’s recent reforms as requirements that enable you to ensure fairness, explore alternatives to traditional punishment, and implement the most equitable solution.

We have designated Charles D. Hobbs to serve as this project’s point of contact, and he can be reached by phone at (313) 355-4460 or by email at charles@streetdemocracy.org. You can also contact any of the undersigned organizations directly. Thank you for giving this letter your attention. We are excited to see the new reforms be implemented and hopeful that we can work together to help end the school-to-prison pipeline.

Sincerely,

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