



SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: LEARNING THE WRONG LESSON FROM THE PARKLAND SHOOTINGS



In the wake of the February school shooting at Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, President Donald Trump **announced** that a school safety commission led by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos would consider the repeal of the Obama-era “Rethink School Discipline” policies.

The **2014 directive** encouraged schools to examine their discipline policies for signs that they were racially discriminatory. The directive also includes guidance on the use of restraints and seclusion and corporal punishment.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooter was white, as were most of the students at the school. In fact, as *The New York Times* reported: “Black students have never been the perpetrators of the mass shootings that have shocked the nation’s conscience nor have minority schools been the targets.”

The *Times* article quotes NEPC fellow Daniel J. Losen:

Children’s safety also includes protection from oppression and bigotry and injustice. Fear-mongering and rhetoric that criminalizes youth of color, children from poor families and children with disabilities should not be tolerated.

In an NEPC policy brief called *Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice*, Losen noted that 28 percent of black male middle school students had been suspended at least once, as compared to 10 percent of white males. Losen found that suspensions are associated with loss of instructional time and higher dropout rates. He wrote:

[T]here is no research base to support frequent suspension or expulsion in response to non-violent and mundane forms of adolescent misbehavior; large disparities by race, gender and disability status are evident in the use of these punishments; frequent suspension and expulsion are associated with negative outcomes; and better alternatives are available.

Instead of overreliance on push-out discipline, what should be done? In another NEPC policy brief, *Law and Order in School and Society: How Discipline and Policing Policies Harm Students of Color, and What We Can Do About It*, Professors Janelle Scott, Michele S. Moses, Kara S. Finnigan, Tina Trujillo, and Darrell D. Jackson offer eight recommendations for keeping schools safe for all students:

1. Develop systematic communication and planning between municipalities and school districts, including integrated city and school policies on policing, housing, transportation, and racial disparity. While this kind of municipal coordination can be challenging, cities with mayoral control of schools, such as Chicago and New York, are in a unique position to pilot such an effort.
2. Redirect funds currently spent on school resource officers to expenditures shown to improve student engagement and social connectivity, including increasing the number of guidance counselors, advanced-level and enrichment courses, socio-emotional learning curricula, and high-quality extracurricular activities.
3. Invest in the creation or support of racially and socioeconomically integrated schools.
4. Integrate community-based policing programs with school restorative and transformative justice initiatives to shift the emphasis from discipline and punishment toward capacity building, relationship building, and positive behavioral interventions and supports.
5. Require teachers, school leaders, and all police/security staff to receive intensive preparation, trauma-informed professional development, and ongoing training on the causes of, and remedies for, racial inequality within and outside of school.
6. Require reporting of in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for charter schools and traditional public schools, disaggregated by race and gender. Develop interventions for schools with racially identifiable, disproportionate rates of these disciplinary actions.
7. Develop multiple measures of schools' effectiveness in place of narrowly focused test-based measures. Use these data to develop more positive, supportive interventions aimed at decreasing suspension, expulsion, and referral rates.
8. Invest in "grow your own" teacher preparation and/or residency programs that help to develop, support, and retain teachers of color and teachers committed to equitable educational practices. Create teacher-police collaborative networks to develop positive supports for students of color within and outside of schools. An untapped resource, paraprofessionals in schools, who often come from the very communities in which they work, could be offered a career ladder.

NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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