

## READERS RESPOND

### School discipline reform works

The author of the op-ed "The paradox of lowering standards" (Aug. 5) may understand statistics, but he fails to grasp the purpose of the new school discipline regulations under consideration by the Maryland State Board of Education. The board's proposed discipline code aims to make sure that all children, of all races, get educated. Every day a child is suspended is a day that child misses a chance to learn — and more than 50,000 Maryland children are suspended or expelled annually. We can all agree that students should be held accountable for their behavior, but discipline must also be fair, appropriate and effective.

The new regulations will help ensure that suspensions or expulsions are used only in the most serious cases and not for typical adolescent behaviors such as disrespect that used to be handled in the school. There are many proven alternatives such as restorative justice and community conferencing that provide accountability and keep the student in school. Ultimately, these regulations will result in safer and more supportive learning environments.

This approach has already been tested — and is proving successful — in Anne Arundel County middle and high schools, where overall nonviolent offenses (such as disrespect) have decreased 27 percent and expulsions of black students are down 37 percent in one year. We are encouraged that this approach is finding success in schools across the state. Discipline reform will be especially beneficial to children with disabilities and children of color who are two and three times more likely to be suspended or expelled under the current rules.

Effective discipline policies make the most of our public investment in education, allowing more children to spend more time in school, actively learning and headed on a path to future success. No matter how you dissect the numbers, the need for change is clear.

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