



# EFFECTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

FOR MARYLAND

A Shared Approach to Keep Children in School and Learning

## ***Frequently Asked Questions: Revisions to Maryland Discipline Regulations***

*The Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) is a non-profit advocacy organization working to improve policy for children across Maryland. ACY fully supports the proposed regulations that adopt a student-first approach which is rooted in effective discipline policies that keep children safe, in the classroom and eliminates disproportionality.*

### What is the problem with school discipline?

Zero tolerance policies with severe consequences have resulted in more than 50,000 Maryland students—particularly students of color and students with disabilities — being suspended, expelled or arrested annually. Research shows that students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended or expelled while African-American students were three times as likely. This difference in suspension rates is known as disproportionality. In addition, many out-of-school suspensions were often for minor offenses that were once handled in school, such as disrespect, insubordination, disruption, and possessing portable communication devices.

### What are the proposed changes?

The Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) proposed several changes to Maryland's discipline regulations. In summary, the regulations:

- Promote disciplinary practices that recognize positive behavior and minimize suspensions and expulsions
- Amend statewide definitions of suspensions and expulsions to standardize lengths of student removal
- Establish an appeal process for parents or students to petition local school boards
- Specify the minimal education services schools must provide to students who received out-of-school suspensions
- Require additional data collection and reporting in order to ensure fair and equitable discipline practices state-wide

### Are suspensions and expulsions prohibited under the proposed regulations?

No. The proposed changes preserve suspensions and expulsions as legitimate disciplinary responses under certain circumstances. The proposed regulations amend the definitions and durations of suspensions to decrease the impact of student alienation and a negative school climate. These changes will create greater consistency across the state and, more importantly, increase instructional time and opportunities for the success of all students.

### Are zero-tolerance policies prohibited under the proposed regulations?

Schools can continue to issue suspensions and expulsions; however, policies that trigger automatic disciplinary actions without the use of discretion are prohibited under the regulatory changes. The only exceptions are for instances triggered by federal law such as weapons possession.



# EFFECTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

FOR MARYLAND

A Shared Approach to Keep Children in School and Learning

## How will the new regulations impact the safety of the school?

School safety remains of paramount importance. In many ways, the changes to the regulations require safety as an explicit consideration in the disciplinary process. For example, conduct that poses an imminent threat of serious harm to other students or staff can still result in an out-of-school suspension or expulsion.

## Will these regulations help school staff and administration?

Yes. Student-teacher interactions and academic performance will improve when there is a school climate that values and respects all members of the school community. This positive school climate also raises student expectations for proper behavior and performance.

## Will these regulations help students succeed?

Yes. Punitive disciplinary policies and high levels of suspension and expulsions negatively impact the entire school. Reports have shown that in schools with zero tolerance policies, there are higher rates of misbehavior, student alienation, and negativity. The proposed regulations aim to increase achievement for all students by fostering positive behavior, reducing out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and cultivating a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

### **WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?**

If you would like to send a letter to the Maryland State Board of Education expressing your support for the changes, or if you would like more information about the regulations, please feel free to contact Ebony Harley at [eharley@acy.org](mailto:eharley@acy.org) or call at (410) 547-9200 x3004.