

## **CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND: FACT SHEET**

The *Children Left Behind Project* is a collaboration of the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy and the Indiana Youth Services Association to share Indiana data on out-of-school suspension, expulsion and their alternatives. These facts emerged:

### **Briefing Paper 1. Zero Tolerance: Assumptions vs. Facts**

A review of the national data on zero tolerance and school safety concluded:

- **There is no credible evidence that out-of-school suspension or expulsion are effective methods for changing student behavior.**
- **Higher rates of suspension and expulsion are associated with poorer school climate, higher dropout rates, and lower achievement.**
- **Minority disproportionality in suspension and expulsion have been consistently documented, and seem to be increasing with the use of zero tolerance.**
- **A wide range of alternatives to zero tolerance are available to promote a productive learning climate and address disruptive behavior.**

The national data provide no evidence that zero tolerance suspensions and expulsions contribute to maintaining safe school climates or improving student behavior.

### **Briefing Paper 2. Unplanned Outcomes: Suspensions and Expulsions in Indiana.**

An examination of Indiana's data on suspension and expulsion revealed that:

- **Indiana ranks first in the nation in its rate of school expulsion, and eighth in out-of-school suspensions in the most recent available national data,. This finding cannot be accounted for by the length of expulsion allowed in Indiana.**
- **Rates of expulsion appear to be decreasing, but out-of-school suspension is increasing.**
- **Over 90% of out-of-school suspensions were accounted for by infractions in the categories Disruptive Behavior and Other.**
- **The top 10% of schools in terms of rate of suspensions account for over 50% of Indiana's out-of-school suspensions.**
- **African American students are four times as likely to be suspended out of school and about two and a half times as likely to be expelled as white students. Hispanic students are also over-represented in suspension and expulsion.**
- **Regardless of demographic factors, schools with higher rates of out-of-school suspension have lower average passing rates on ISTEP.**

### **Briefing Paper 3. Discipline is Always Teaching: Effective Alternatives**

Interviews with Indiana principals showed that they maintained high academic and behavioral expectations and were not afraid to remove a student if safety demanded it. But they also;

- **Clarify expectations regarding office referrals and train staff in classroom management strategies.**
- **Actively teach appropriate behavior through school philosophy and preventive programs**
- **Communicate and collaborate with parents.**
- **Seek to reconnect alienated students through mentoring and anger management.**
- **Develop creative options in the school and community to keep even those students who are suspended and expelled engaged in learning.**

Such efforts are not free, but require significant commitments of time and resources.

#### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered:

1. **Reserve zero tolerance disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe of disruptive behaviors, and define those behaviors explicitly.**
2. **Replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies with graduated systems of discipline; scale consequences to the seriousness of the infraction.**
3. **Improve data collection strategies on school discipline at the state level; assist local educators in using disciplinary data to address their school's safety and disciplinary needs.**
4. **Improve collaboration and communication among schools, parents, juvenile justice, and mental health to develop an array of alternatives for challenging youth.**
5. **Implement preventive measures that can improve school climate and reconnect alienated students.**
6. **Expand the array of options available to schools for dealing with disruptive or violent behavior. In particular, ensure that teachers receive training in classroom management strategies that provide them with the tools they need for handling misbehavior at the classroom level.**
7. **Evaluate all school discipline or school violence prevention strategies to ensure that all disciplinary interventions, programs, or strategies are truly effective.**

Together these results show that it is possible to maintain a safe and productive school climate without removing a large number of students from the opportunity to learn. Indiana's schools and Indiana's children deserve nothing less.