



## Behavior Education Plan – FAQ for Families

### Why change the district's approach to discipline and behavior?

Simply put, punishment does not work in changing behavior - teaching and providing additional support as needed results in learning and behavior change. In order to accomplish our vision as a district and get the best results for all students, we need to ensure that each of our schools is a place where all students are able and expected to learn. That means putting the right systems in place so all students have the opportunity to develop positive behavior skills.

National research clearly shows that exclusionary practices that focus on removing students from school are ineffective in changing student behavior. In fact, studies show that:

- Suspension and expulsion predict higher rates of future misbehavior.
- School removals are associated with a higher likelihood of school dropout.
- Suspension and expulsion increase the likelihood that the child will enter the criminal justice system.

Research also shows that these policies have disproportionate effects, especially for African American students and students with disabilities. Our district data parallels this national trend.

This reality signals a need for a shift in our thinking and our day-to-day practices. Rather than a code of conduct based on a punitive model, the new Behavior Education Plan represents a teaching and learning model that gives students the opportunity and support to develop positive behavior skills.

### How will things be different with this new plan?

There is a philosophical shift at the heart of the Behavior Education Plan. It moves away from the belief that all students do well when they want to, which requires motivation through punishment and reward. Instead, the Plan is based on the belief that all students do well when they can, and when they are not doing well, it is due to an unmet need or lagging skill. Supporting students to do well requires teaching - teaching behavioral expectations and teaching social emotional learning so that students have the skills to behave positively.

More specifically, the Behavior Education Plan:

- represents a teaching and learning model rather than rules and consequences model.
  - Students receive specific support when they are unable to meet the behavior expectations set for them. When a student does not meet the behavior expectations, school staff will respond with strategies that are designed to help the student learn from their mistakes and make better choices in the future.
  - When disciplinary consequences are necessary, they must be paired with interventions so that students can receive the instruction and support they need to make meaningful changes in their behavior.
- is based on progressive discipline.
  - Interventions and consequences always start at the lowest level and increase when misbehavior is repeated.
- decreases exclusionary practices.
  - Out of school suspensions and expulsions are limited to behavior that demonstrates a safety risk, and the use of restorative practices is increased so that students are able to repair harm, restore relationships and successfully return to the learning environment.

- It is anticipated that the number of days of lost instruction, due to suspensions and expulsions, will be significantly reduced.
- includes parents as partners at the problem solving table.
  - The Behavior Education Plan requires staff to contact parents immediately if a suspension occurs and within 24 hours if there is no suspension.
- requires regular data analysis and problem-solving by school teams and central office to ensure that goals are being met and make adjustments where needed.

## **Why do we need one plan for elementary schools and another one for secondary schools?**

There are two versions of the Behavior Education Plan - one for elementary students and one for middle and high school students. Because students in elementary school are different ages and at different developmental stages than students in middle or high school, they require different, age-appropriate supports and strategies for behavior education.

## **Does the Behavior Education Plan mean that students stay in the class no matter what behaviors they are demonstrating?**

No. Even with great classroom management in all environments, there will be times when a student needs additional support that cannot be provided in the classroom. Just as we would not force a child to remain in the classroom when they are physically ill, the Behavior Education Plan does not to force a child that is in distress to remain in the classroom.

## **Does the Behavior Education Plan prohibit the use of suspension?**

The only grade levels for which out of school suspension is not an option is in grades K-3. Suspension is not developmentally appropriate for children in this age group. Many children learn to manage their emotions or control their impulses in kindergarten and first grade. But for others it sometimes takes much longer. When suspensions are issued in response to behavior, young children may not understand why they are not allowed to go to school. The "lesson" of their punishment is likely lost on them. It is important to use discipline as teaching tool instead of as punishment. Alternatives to suspension include teaching children strategies to manage their emotions and ways to resolve conflicts peacefully, providing guidance for students to solve problems, addressing unmet needs including basic needs and social emotional needs (i.e. relationships), and providing opportunities to repair harm that resulted from their behavior.

At all grade levels, the Behavior Education Plan includes the progressive use of discipline. This means students have the space to make mistakes, learn from them and receive support to change their behavior over time. Every reasonable effort should be made to correct inappropriate student behavior using interventions and the least severe disciplinary responses possible. More significant responses, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, are used only for the most serious situations.

Some may think that suspensions remove disorderly students and deter other students from misbehaving, thereby improving the school environment so that well-behaving students can learn without distractions. Yet there is no evidence that frequent reliance on removing misbehaving students improves school safety or student behavior (APA, 2008).

## **Does Behavior Education and the decreased use of suspension mean that students will no longer be held accountable for their actions?**

No. Our district holds high expectations for all students in their intellectual/academic as well as their social/emotional development in school. We know from national research that relying on exclusionary practices that remove students from their classroom and classmates, are not effective in improving student behavior. The approach outlined in the Behavior Education Plan offers more effective ways of holding students to high expectations and providing them the support they need to meet those expectations.

Students are more willing to resolve conflicts through repairing harm and relationships when they are invested in the school community. The Behavior Education Plan focuses on developing positive relationships and creating school communities in which every student feels they belong and has the social emotional skills to behave positively and resolve conflicts peacefully.

## **How are restorative practices part of the Behavior Education Plan?**

Using restorative practices alongside Positive Behavior Support (PBS) can change the inactive role that traditional discipline can play. Restorative circles and conferences are effective interventions that address serious issues; such as theft of personal property, physical altercations, academic dishonesty, harassment, chronic tardiness, vandalism and disrespectful behavior without creating more disconnect. These powerful practices help students develop empathy, accountability, and responsibility. Restorative practices encourage student engagement and personal involvement in school, and have a significant role in creating a positive climate.

## **Under the Behavior Education Plans, can a parent appeal an out of school suspension?**

Yes, parents have the right to appeal the decision to suspend their child. Families should request the appeal within five days of the start of the suspension. In every suspension case, families receive a letter with details about the suspension, including information to pursue an appeal.