



SAFETY WITH DIGNITY

Policy Recommendations from the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline

City of New York
Mayor Bill de Blasio

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Introduction

In February of 2015, Mayor Bill de Blasio launched the Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline—a one-year task force charged with developing policy recommendations to enhance the well-being and safety of students and staff in the City’s public schools, while minimizing the use of suspensions, arrests and summonses. The Leadership Team involved more than 150 stakeholders, including representatives from city agencies, community organizations, and unions, as well as researchers, practitioners, educators, students and parents

Research shows that, all things being equal, when students are suspended or arrested in school their chances of being held back in school, dropping out and/or entering the juvenile justice system increase. Furthermore, overly punitive responses have been shown to be an ineffective way to improve student behavior and school climate. For these reasons, national consensus has begun to shift towards deploying more effective methods of addressing student discipline and promoting positive behavior.

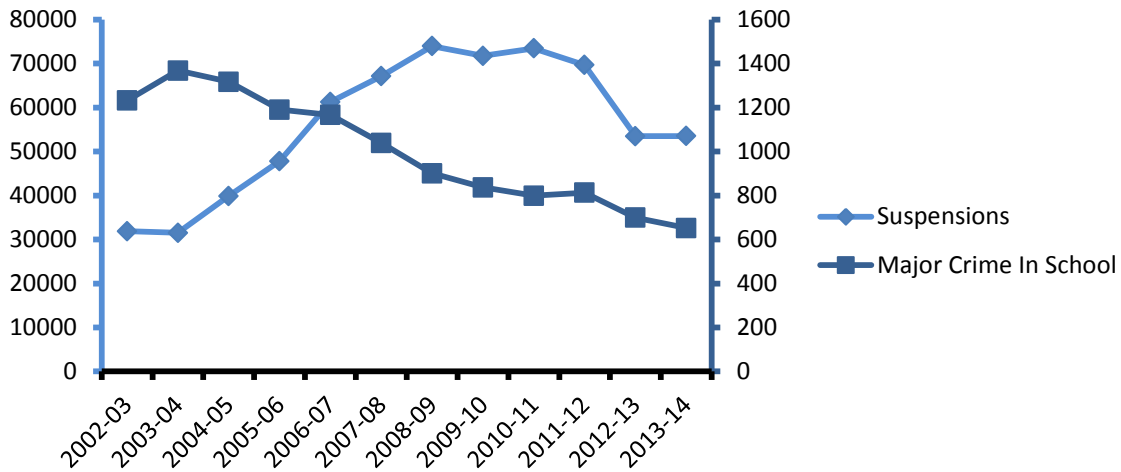
After a 63 percent increase in suspensions between School Year 2000 and 2010, New York City has taken steps in recent years to significantly reduce suspensions and arrests while maintaining a safe school environment. From SY2012 to SY2014 suspensions declined by 23 percent with concomitant declines in arrests (55 percent) and summonses (67 percent) issued by NYPD’s School Safety Division (SSD). This progress has not come at the expense of student or staff safety. During the same time period, major crime declined by 20 percent and all crime by 24 percent in New York City public schools.¹

“No parent should have to choose between a school that’s safe for their child and a school where every student is treated fairly. All our schools can and must be both.”

- Mayor Bill de Blasio



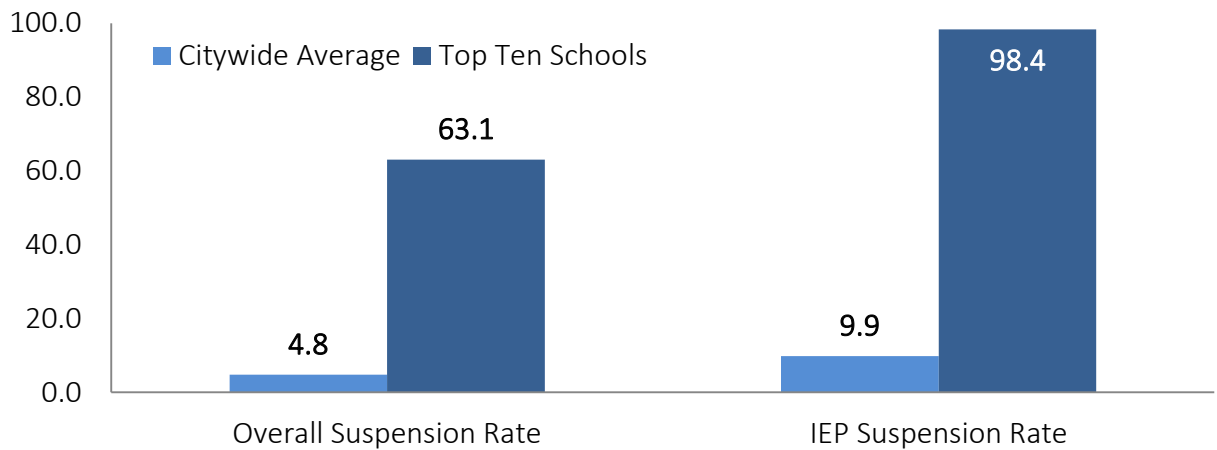
¹ These favorable trends have continued this school year with suspensions declining by another 11 percent; arrests declining by 19 percent; and summonses declining by 12 percent comparing the beginning of this school year through March to the same time period last year.



Several factors have contributed to declines in the use of punitive discipline. Former New York Chief Judge Judith Kaye chaired the New York City School-Justice Partnership Taskforce that released a highly influential report condemning the overuse of exclusionary discipline in City schools and making numerous recommendations, including the creation of a multi-stakeholder Leadership Team to improve school climate. Advocates successfully urged the passage of the School Safety Act by the New York City Council, bringing greater transparency to rates of arrests, summonses and suspensions in the City’s public schools. The Department of Education (DOE) revised its Discipline Code several times in response to feedback from students, parents, educators and advocates. These changes clarified the need for schools to utilize guidance interventions and urged parsimony in the use of suspensions. DOE also began training an increasing number of schools in Restorative Justice. Additionally, SSD introduced its entire force to Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) in order to improve safety agents’ skills in de-escalating conflict and has systematically begun to train its officers on more in-depth CPS practices.

These steps demonstrate progress towards a more effective approach to climate and discipline in the New York City public schools. However, continued inconsistencies in disciplinary approaches and high levels of suspensions, arrests and summons in several districts indicate that further system-wide policy and practice change is needed.

Moreover, the prevalence of very high-numbers of suspensions, arrests and summonses in a small number of schools suggests that additional supports and guidance also are necessary. For example, although the average suspension rate is 4.8 per 100 students, the top ten highest suspending schools (by rate) issue 63 suspensions per 100 students and the top 10 schools with the highest suspension rates of students with special needs issue 98 suspensions per 100 students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Students in these schools are significantly more likely to be excluded from classroom learning and become court-involved than their peers. SSD data show a similar pattern: just ten school campuses account for 49 percent of all summonses and 19 percent of all arrests made by the SSD.²



Lastly, troubling disparities in race and disability status have remained consistent, or increased, on a system-wide level. For example, during SY2014, Black students comprised 28 percent of student enrollment but made up 61 percent of arrests. Meanwhile, White students comprised 15 percent of student enrollment and made up 5 percent of arrests. Many Leadership Team members expressed concern about perceived disparities in the treatment of LGBTQ youth, an area in which there is a need for reliable data.

² Data calculated from the start of SY2015 to mid-March (7/1/14 – 3/15/15).

The Recommendations

The following recommendations reflect a balanced approach of structural changes, policy reforms, training, and additional programming required to comprehensively and durably improve the climate of New York City's schools to truly achieve safety with dignity.

1. Articulate a clear mission statement on student discipline that embraces positive supports and presents a strategy for implementing this mission.

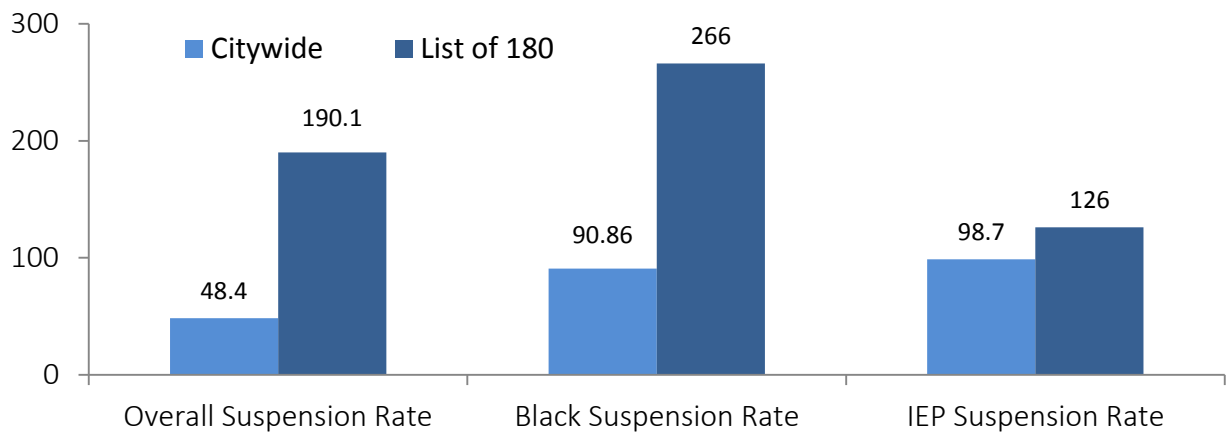
The Mayor, Chancellor and Police Commissioner should articulate a clear vision for addressing student discipline that minimizes removal from the classroom and promotes de-escalation, reflection and community building. Such a vision should seek to reduce unfairness and inconsistencies in use of disciplinary removal, arrests and summonses across the system.

The Mayor, Chancellor and Police Commissioner should communicate clear, measureable goals and expectations for positive climate, discipline and safety and also commit to:

- Train superintendents, school administrators, teachers, school safety agents (SSAs), and others, on strategies to ensure safety and create positive school climates and progressive discipline;
- Provide social-emotional skills development for students as part of regular classroom instruction and school-wide programs at all grade levels;
- Create meaningful opportunities for input from students and parents to improve the environment for learning in schools; and
- Create positive, non-punitive, incentives for principals and teachers to implement progressive school climate supports.

2. Provide additional school climate supports, including staff and training, for schools with the highest numbers of suspensions, arrests and/or summonses.

While there are nearly 1800 public schools citywide, 10 percent or 180 schools³ account for 41 percent of all suspensions and the vast majority of arrests and summonses issued by the School Safety Division of the NYPD.



In order to improve school climate and safely reduce suspensions and arrests further in these high-priority schools, DOE and NYPD should:

- Provide intensive support for school-level planning, training and on-site coaching in school climate and positive discipline practices (including restorative approaches). Funding should begin with an initial investment in a significant subset of the highest-priority schools in conjunction with an outcome evaluation;
- Increase the number of counselors, social workers and other supports to improve school culture and climate; and
- Prioritize additional training in de-escalation practices for SSAs and resources and technical assistance to schools with the highest numbers of arrests and summonses.

³ The Leadership Team designated 180 schools as “high-priority schools” for climate supports/interventions. These schools have high rates of suspensions, arrests, summonses, students living in temporary housing and/or chronic absenteeism and as such should be prioritized for additional supports.

3. Increase school climate supports system-wide.

Evidence from other localities implementing school climate strategies indicate that system-wide coordination and dedicated staffing are required for effective assessment, planning and implementation at the school level. Without consistent attention to building positive school climate and discipline, many schools will be unlikely to successfully make the shift in approach.

To ensure appropriate staffing and guidance to assist schools in shifting their practice, the DOE should:

- Appoint a Senior Advisor to the Chancellor on School Climate and Discipline;
- Assign staff at the borough and school level to assist and monitor and assist schools in implementing positive climate, discipline and safety strategies;
- Establish protocols for self-assessment and planning by schools to improve climate and discipline, and provide flexible funding for schools to allocate to implement these plans;
- Increase the number of counselors and social work services across the school system, and reframe the role of school-based social workers so they can serve as a resource to school-based crisis management teams; and
- Increase awareness and provide professional development for school personnel and SSAs on the impact arrests and suspensions have on students.

4. Improve citywide and school-level data collection and use.

At present, no city agency captures the full number of students who are arrested, issued summonses or handcuffed in New York City schools. Nor is any information available regarding the arrest of students with special needs. This impairs policy makers' ability to allocate resources effectively.

To ensure better tracking and utilization of data to improve climate and discipline, the DOE should:

- Develop a system interface between schools and NYPD to accurately track the full number of students arrested, summonsed and handcuffed;
- Use the NYC School Survey and focus groups with students to collect better data on student perceptions of climate and discipline;
- Provide training for school personnel on DOE's on-line data collection systems in order to promote consistency in use; and
- Create a systematic way to collect data on progressive disciplinary strategies, such as restorative circles and conferencing, to inform and improve implementation.

Further, in order to improve transparency, NYPD and DOE should:

- Report instances of arrests and summonses and use of mechanical restraints to the federal Department of Education Office of Civil Rights;
- Report information by school to the public by key indicators like race, gender and disability status; and
- Report the full number of students arrested and issued summonses in schools.

5. Implement protocols and training to improve the scanning process and remove scanners where appropriate.

Currently, there are 80 permanent scanning campuses throughout the City. Despite a 48 percent reduction in total crime in New York City public schools over the last decade, not one school has removed a permanent scanner during that period. Moreover, there are no written guidelines for removing or adding school scanners.

In order to evaluate the need for scanning in schools and campuses and ensure scanning is conducted in as minimally intrusive a manner as possible, NYPD and DOE should:

- Jointly develop an assessment to determine criteria by which scanners can be removed or added to/from schools/campuses;
- Jointly develop a transparent process for evaluation of the use of scanners in schools to be conducted on a regular basis;
- Develop specialized training for school administration staff and SSAs on roles and responsibilities regarding use of scanning, and prioritize scanning schools to receive joint training of school staff and SSAs in Collaborative Problem Solving; and
- Ensure the scanning process and expectations for behavior of students and staff are clearly communicated through signage and clarification of protocols.

6. Establish written policies and protocols for NYPD and DOE that promote de-escalation and integration between educators and agents.

In SY2012, the School Safety Division changed leadership, began emphasizing de-escalation and trained all staff in Collaborative Problem Solving. Since then, there has been a sharp decline in arrests/summonses. Unfortunately, to date, many of these informal but successful approaches have not been written into official policy nor have precinct officers been exposed to them.

In order to ensure schools are safe and supportive, all adults in the school building must work collaboratively and their policies need to be memorialized in writing. As such, NYPD and DOE should:

- Release a joint memo outlining new protocols for integrating School Safety Division personnel into the overall school community;
- Memorialize efforts to train all School Safety Division personnel in CPS, conflict resolution, use of Warning Cards and other de-escalation practices; and
- Include training for all NYPD officers in best practices for policing schools.

7. Create Resource Coordination Teams within the new Borough Field Support Centers.

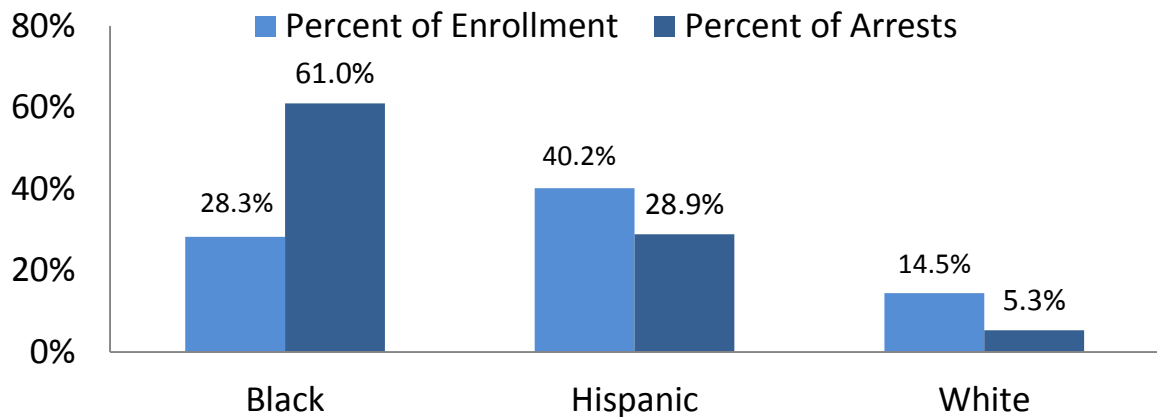
Currently, there is no centralized system for schools to effectively access the community-based supports and services available for their highest needs students and families. Schools with limited staff resources and capacity must piece together independent relationships with mental health, housing, preventative services and other organizations.

The DOE should pilot the creation of Resource Coordination Teams to serve the two neighborhoods with the highest concentration of high-priority schools (the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn) to:

- Act as liaisons between schools, government agencies and community service providers to assist educators in accessing resources;
- Centralize resource mapping to promote greater efficiency for schools in accessing supports; and
- Provide support and clinical supervision for social workers and other staff in high-priority schools.

8. Implement strategies and supports to specifically reduce disparities in discipline and school-based arrests and summonses.

Despite overall declines in suspensions, arrests and summonses, disparities have increased. Between SY2012 and SY2014, suspension disparities between Black and Hispanic compared to White students increased as did the suspensions disparities between students with special needs and general education students.



To build awareness and support action to reduce disparities, the DOE and NYPD should:

- Create a high-level standing cross-organization committee to develop an action plan to reduce racial and IEP disparities in suspensions, arrests and summonses, and to investigate the extent to which disparities may be occurring for LGBT students and other populations;
- Provide schools with regular reports on discipline, climate and safety data, including identifying patterns of disparity by sub-population; and
- Collaborate with community stakeholders to review implementation and effectiveness of Respect for All in promoting a safe and respectful environment for students.

9. Improve training of staff in high-priority schools about how to identify and meet the needs of students with special needs.

Students with special needs were suspended 2.6 times as frequently as students without disabilities in SY2014. Moreover, many high-priority schools have large numbers of students with special needs and high suspension rates for these students.

In order to more effectively support the needs of these students and reduce disciplinary disparities for this population, the DOE should:

- Improve communication between the Office of Safety and Youth Development and the Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support;
- Provide training to build the capacity of schools to develop student assessments and plans for students with special or high-needs; and
- Clarify the protocols for conducting, and provide meaningful oversight of, suspension hearings for these students.

36%

of suspensions in 2014 were given to students with disabilities, who represent only

18%

of the student population.

10. Promote transparency, consistency, and information-sharing between schools receiving students via Safety Transfers and DOE Central.

Safety Transfer protocols differ from borough to borough and are not widely understood by principals. Schools are provided with little information regarding the kinds of supports needed for students who are transferred for safety purposes. Allowing students a fresh start at new schools is a core principle that educators share, yet students would have a better chance to succeed if their receiving school was better prepared to meet their needs.

To improve the quality of care schools provide to students receiving Safety Transfers, the DOE should:

- Systematize Safety Transfer protocols across borough enrollment offices and ensure fairness in the distribution of Safety Transfers;
- Develop a consultative process for seeking input from principals on the protocol for student placement and data-sharing; and
- Allow for Safety Transfers for students who have acted as aggressors and may become future victims.

About the Mayor’s Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline

Safety with Dignity details policy recommendations made by the Mayor’s Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline (“Leadership Team”)⁴. The Leadership Team is a one-year task force that was launched by Mayor Bill de Blasio in February 2015 with the mission of developing recommendations to enhance the well-being and safety of students and staff in the City’s public schools, while minimizing the use of suspensions, arrests and summonses. Co-chaired by Ursulina Ramirez, Chief of Staff, NYC Department of Education and Vincent Schiraldi, Senior Advisor, Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Leadership Team was charged with the task of examining data and studying best practices in order to:

- Improve the use of data to assess the effectiveness of current policy and practice, and spread promising positive discipline innovations system-wide;
- Reduce the frequency and duration of suspensions and minimize arrests and referrals to the justice system for school-based disciplinary offenses;
- Reduce disparities by race, gender, disability and Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender (LGBT) status in student discipline, arrests and summonses;
- Increase access to mental health and other community-based supports for high-need students; and
- Update the Discipline Code and the Memorandum of Understanding between the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and the Department of Education (DOE) to align the use of school discipline and security personnel and security measures with supportive school climate goals.

To meet its objectives, the Leadership Team developed five Working Groups that involved more than 150 stakeholders,⁵ including representatives from city agencies, community organizations, and unions, as well as researchers, practitioners, educators, students and parents.

Over the past five months, these Working Groups convened to define a vision and system-wide approach to positive climate, discipline and safety in schools, as well as to

⁴ For a full list of Leadership Team members, please see <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/sclt/index.page>.

⁵ For a full list of Working Group members, and their affiliations, see <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/sclt/index.page>.

develop targeted initiatives to assist schools with high rates of suspensions, arrests and summonses – and high disparities in those areas – to improve their practices. Recommendations were developed from this Phase I of deliberations, and are proposed for consideration by the Mayor, DOE Chancellor, Police Commissioner and other relevant entities. A second report will be prepared in the fall (Phase II) that examines how to align existing policy to this new vision and approach, including revising the City’s school discipline code as well as the memorandum of understanding between NYPD and DOE.