

Practical Steps Toward Advancing Equitable and Supportive Discipline

A Guide for School Boards

WHY THIS MATTERS

Research from the University of California, Los Angeles and UC Berkeley's California Race, Education, and Community Healing (REACH) Network indicates that exclusionary discipline practices — such as suspensions — negatively affect student learning across all grade levels and contribute to long-term adverse outcomes like higher dropout rates.^{1,2} These practices disproportionately impact historically marginalized groups of students, including students of color and students with disabilities.

Non-exclusionary discipline approaches focus on keeping students in the classroom (rather than excluding them) while repairing harm done to students, addressing underlying causes of behavior, and building positive relationships based on trust and growth. These approaches do not excuse infractions or misbehavior. Instead, they provide educators and students with practical skills, coping strategies, and alternative methods for managing challenges in school and classroom settings. **By collaborating with their governance teams, school board members can shape discipline policies that promote equity, improve student outcomes, and create positive school climates.**

The role of school boards in equitable discipline practices

School board members represent their communities' needs and values. In partnership with superintendents, they shape school culture and policies that influence every student's success. As part of a governance team, board members ensure that district discipline practices align with both the district's vision for student success and research-supported strategies that foster positive learning environments. Staying informed about current research and data-driven strategies is essential for making sound policy decisions that uphold accountability and sustain effective, equitable practices.

Key decisions for school boards to consider

I. Set clear expectations for restorative discipline policies

- » **What this means:** Adopt policies that prioritize repairing harm and resolving conflicts over punitive measures like suspensions.
- » **What school boards can do:** Work with the superintendent to ensure implementation of policies that reflect restorative approaches. Monitor how these policies are applied across schools and their impact on reducing suspensions and expulsions.

II. Advocate for funding to support training and resources

- » **What this means:** Support professional development opportunities to equip educators with effective restorative-focused classroom management tools.

¹ Corral, M.D., Bishop, J.P., Bristol, T.J., Espino, M.L. (2024). *California Race, Education, and Community Healing (REACH) Network Baseline Report*. Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

² Rumberger, R. W., & Losen, D. J. (2016). *The high cost of harsh discipline and its disparate impact*. The Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA.

- » **What school boards can do:** Include resources in the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that fund training on de-escalation, bias awareness, and restorative practices. Schedule updates on how training is improving school climate and discipline outcomes.

III. Monitor discipline data

- » **What this means:** Collaborate with the superintendent to track discipline data and request regular updates to the board of trustees on policy implementation.
- » **What school boards can do:** Request that district staff disaggregate discipline data by gender, race, disability, and economic status. Ensure policies are applied consistently.

IV. Encourage family and community engagement

- » **What this means:** Advocate for partnerships with families and local organizations to develop solutions that reflect community values.
- » **What school boards can do:** Request that district plans involve families in restorative approaches, such as participation in restorative circles or mentorship programs. Support partnerships with local community organizations that can provide additional resources for students.

V. Prioritize equity in decision-making

- » **What this means:** Adopt policies that promote consistent, impartial discipline practices that foster accountability, growth, and stronger teacher-student relationships.
- » **What school boards can do:** Work with governance teams to identify and address discipline trends and patterns that indicate disparities. Ensure that policies create inclusive, supportive environments that reduce discipline disparities.

The lessons and impact of the CA REACH Network

The CA REACH Network unites schools, districts, researchers, and community partners to foster equitable learning environments. Participating districts are leading efforts to reduce

discipline disparities and enhance student outcomes by collaborating and sharing best practices.

- **REACH works with 10 school systems across California to address discipline disparities.**
- For example:**

- » **Crete Academy** (Los Angeles) — Replaced suspensions with restorative circles where students, staff, and peers resolve conflicts collaboratively.
- » **El Roble Intermediate School** (Claremont) — Launched a mentorship program pairing students with caring adults to provide guidance and reduce behavior issues.
- » **Longwood Elementary** (Hayward) — Trained staff to use restorative conversations instead of punishments, leading to stronger relationships and fewer suspensions.

This executive summary is adapted from the **CA REACH Network Baseline Report**. Read the full report for more info, including full research findings and actionable steps to reduce disparities and improve school climates.

Key questions for school boards

Consider the following to learn more about the climate of student discipline in your schools.

- Which student groups are most affected by suspensions or expulsions, and why?
- Which professional development programs address bias, restorative practices, and de-escalation techniques?
- How are families and community partners included in discipline reform efforts?
- What processes are in place to collect and review discipline data? How can they be improved?
- How is the district measuring progress in reducing disparities and improving school climates?

For additional resources or to learn more about the California REACH Network, contact **UCLA's Center for the Transformation of Schools (CTS)** or **UC Berkeley's Center for Research on Expanding Educational Opportunity (CREO)**.