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Presentation to Senate Interim Study 18-07 - Study on SB 1435, to examine creating a formalized appeals process for students when considering alternative forms of discipline in Oklahoma's schools

School suspensions fuel Oklahoma's school-to-prison pipeline.

During suspensions, children lose precious time in the classroom when they need to be learning foundational skills that will determine their success in school and life. The 3rd grade has been documented as an especially pivotal school year for a child's academic success or failure.

Children do not start school at the same skill level. Struggling to read and understand concepts their peers seem to pick up easily often leads to frustration, which can be expressed in negative behaviors and outbursts. These are the children who get sent to the principal's office and are at risk of suspension. Suspending already distressed eight year olds further compounds the situation, as the children will fall farther behind academically, while the root causes of their behavioral problems are ignored.

Here's the bigger picture. Children forced out of school for disruptive behavior are often being sent back to the source of their stress, trauma, and unhappiness. Children who act out are often reacting to negative influences in their home environment. Stigmatized and failing academically, these children are far less likely to graduate high school, and high school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than their peers.

Suspensions hurt disabled children.

Students with disabilities are twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as non-disabled students, according to the Civil Rights Data Collection (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html>), Children most vulnerable to suspension, those who act out and misbehave in class, often have learning disabilities and emotional or mental health needs.

"Disability status is a powerful predictor of who gets caught in the school-to-prison pipeline," stated Kayla Bower, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Disability Law Center. Classrooms or school staff may not be equipped to serve these students, or may be unable to make reasonable accommodations so the students can engage fully in their learning environment. Suspension is not a solution for these issues.

Suspensions hurt children of color.

In Oklahoma, the out-of-school suspension for black students is three times the rate of non-Hispanic white students.

(<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8833-children-who-have-been-suspended-from-school-by-race?loc=38&loct=2#detailed/2/38/false/1021/10,11,9,12,1,185,13|/17704,17705>)

School discipline data shows that black students are more likely to be referred to the principal's office for subjective behaviors, such as "disrespectful" or "disruptive" behavior. Their white peers are more likely to be referred to the office for objective violations, such as smoking or vandalism.*

Solutions to address behavioral issues.

There ARE solutions to early behavioral issues that help the children; suspension isn't one of them. Suspensions push "problem" children out of the education system rather than working in partnership with the community to address root causes and the needs of the children. Alternative learning settings; increased emphasis on reading/learning skills for struggling students during the entry grades (K-3); teacher professional development in supporting the social-emotional development of young children;

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providing mental health services for elementary-aged students; and providing sufficient funding for counselors, special education services and text books are better ways to address this issue.

If you care about kids, please care about this issue.

“In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunities of an education.”

– U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)

*1 Russell Skiba, et al., *Parsing Disciplinary Disproportionality: Contributions of Infraction, Student and School Characteristics to Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion*. 51 *American Educational Research Journal* 640 (2014).