



Security Cannot Be Achieved Through Discipline

IDRA Testimony On HB 268, Submitted by Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., to the Georgia House Education Subcommittee on Policy, February 13, 2025

Dear Chair Erwin and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., I am the IDRA Georgia advocacy director. IDRA is an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

We have a few concerns with House Bill 268, but in general, we really support this bill and are excited in the direction this conversation is going around how to make our schools safer.

One concern is that there is a very common conflation of discipline with security. And a lot of the records that are being referenced in this bill are discipline records to be used as an indicator of a security risk and labeling children as threats. We are concerned about how this can exacerbate existing disparities in school discipline processes and systems across the state.

Right now, Black children are at three times more likely than their white peers to be disciplined in Georgia public schools even though Black students are not more likely to misbehave (Arciaga, 2025). Similarly, students with disabilities are 1.5 times more likely to be punished. We must make sure that those disparities are top of mind and are not made worse by building a system on top of them. We see a lot of the intention and mindfulness that has gone into crafting this bill, and we do have some recommendations for this.

We noticed the changes regarding the time period for the records that are to be reported changed from 24 months to 12 months in some cases. That is a great start. Our contention is that we want to give students a chance. They are growing. Their brains are developing. Students are learning right and wrong. Students make mistakes at age 13 or 7 that should not follow them their whole lives. We want them to be able to grow out of the label.

We recognize and appreciate that there is a dispute process in the bill. Right now, there has not been a lot of development around what that dispute process can look like. I recognize it taps into the parent's bill of rights. We recommend clarifying language about the dispute process for a parent and student who are trying to revise their record may go through so that it is not simply dependent on the subjective opinion of a principal or their designee.

Like students, principals are human. And sometimes children get characterized in a way that is not always representative of their full potential. We want to make sure that we are giving options for children to outgrow the behavior that they make a mistake in their younger years and find success later on so that Georgia is not setting them up for failure.

We also want to highlight the sharing of records with teachers. As a former high school teacher in a low-income community, many of my students would have been on this list. I would have been receiving this report pretty regularly. We want to make sure that teachers who are receiving these reports about students are given the support and training they need to build relationships with their students. I recognize there language about this in the bill. But even with Tier 1 and Tier 2 training – which we really want to commend and recognize – there are additional layers that can be added to help teachers feel prepared to support students who may be carrying a lot of experiences that have impacted their educational experience.

We really appreciate Chairman Erwin and Rep. Persinger’s willingness to develop this bill and the speaker’s openness to significantly update the way we do school discipline and safety in Georgia. This is really an exciting conversation, and we are grateful to be able to have been part of it. Thank you so much.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., Georgia Advocacy Director, at mikayla.arciaga@idra.org.

Resources

Arciaga, M. (February 2025). Discipline is Not Security – Dismantling Disparities Should be Top of Mind When Developing School Safety Policy in Georgia. <https://idra.news/GaDisciplineBrief>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.