

bureaucratic barriers and add prolonged time before a students' return to the classroom, leading them to miss valuable instruction.

Teachers currently have broad discretion to remove students from the classroom under the law. In 2023-24, over 600,000 students were removed from the classroom, and between 2020-21 and 2023-24, the number of students disciplined in Texas schools increased by 6% (TEA, 2024). Expanding this discretion and building new barriers to reentry will further escalate the student removal trends in our school.

We respect teachers and vocally support policies that increase their pay, offer training and technical assistance on creating safe and culturally sustaining schools, and invest in professional support staff, including counselors and behavioral health specialists, who can support educators in managing challenging behaviors. The evidence is clear, however, that resorting to “zero tolerance” exclusionary discipline policies against children is an ineffective and harmful response to student misbehavior, especially behavior that is subjectively labeled as “disruptive” and “unruly.”

To the contrary, exclusionary discipline practices – especially discretionary practices – are well-documented as having a disproportionate impact on Black students, other students of color, and students with disabilities. For example, in 2023-24, Black students represented 13% of public school enrollment in Texas, but nearly double (24%) the percentage of students receiving in-school suspensions, even though they are not more likely to misbehave. In comparison, white students represented 25% of enrollment but 20% of students receiving in-school suspensions (TEA, 2024).

We believe the solution to supporting students and educators is not to increase barriers to return to the classroom but to instead implement research-based, student-centered approaches to address problematic behavior and deescalate conflict. School districts must adopt policies and practices that cultivate strong relationships between diverse, well-prepared educators and staff and the students and families in a school community. These relationships help to promote positive and supportive school climates and enable challenging issues to be identified and addressed early, with appropriate interventions.

Removal from the classroom harms those relationships. It does not give students the opportunity to understand the harmful impact of the behavior, and it disincentivizes educators from teaching students critical social emotional skills to manage their own behavior and relationships in the classroom.

We urge the committee to remove Section 9 from the bill. Rather than adopting harmful exclusionary discipline policies like Section 9 of SB 27, IDRA urges the committee to:

- Invest in effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline that address root causes of challenging behavior;
- Increase school-based mental and behavioral health resources, including counseling and social work professionals;

- Train teachers and school employees in effective classroom management techniques, including on how to recognize and effectively intervene in instances of bullying and harassment; and
- Collect and assess comprehensive data to better identify and address disparate disciplinary outcomes.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Kaci Wright, kaci.wright@idra.org.

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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.