

Education Policy
Minnesota House of Representatives
Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Dear Madam Chair Cheryl Youakim and Members, Good Afternoon:

Many thanks again for the opportunity to share my son's suspension story. As I have said before, my son who has nonverbal autism and does not comprehend cause/effect nor understand suspension was suspended by Jaysen Anderson in Bloomington Public Schools.

I have also shared before how school discipline disparity affects not just the child, but the whole family, as I along with my son's father have been affected by this emotionally, mentally, physically and financially.

Further, I have shared and testified before this committee that one of the reasons for discipline disparity for black and brown boys as well as students with disabilities is implicit bias.

Today I would like to share with you the cost of school discipline disparity and possible solutions.

In March of 2018, U.S Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report about school discipline disparities for black students, boys, and students with disabilities. This report stated while this issue is complex, school districts want to create alternative non-exclusionary methods. Research has shown that students who experience discipline that removes them from the classroom are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school, and become involved in the juvenile justice system. Studies have shown this can result in decreased earning potential and added costs to society, such as incarceration and lost tax revenue to the tune of billions of dollars nationally. (Source: GAO school discipline report, March 2018).

Possible solutions for state legislators to consider:

- Charging MDE in collaboration with stakeholders to come up with solutions which would include school districts or charter schools with persistent racial disparities being required to use some of their general education funds to use on staff training as well as other methods to reduce discipline disparities.
- Creating within MDE an office in charge of decreasing racial school discipline disparities that offers training and education on implicit bias, unconscious racism, positive behavior support techniques, understanding IDEIA, IEP, etc. I added special education training because a letter from U.S

Dept of Education (see attached) highlighted that while 10% of students with disabilities faced high rates of removal from school, discipline for children of color with disabilities particularly black children was even higher – 19%. In other words, students with disabilities who are minorities are disciplined more.

- Collecting individual principals and administrators discipline disparities data within school districts and holding them accountable for their disparities with meaningful consequences.
- Recognizing schools and administrators who do not have discipline disparities and/or have implemented methods that are working – positive reinforcement.
- I understand some of these suggestions may have a fiscal note but doing nothing or keeping the status quo will have a higher cost in human toll as well as financial and societal burdens.

Finally, I would like to remind school principals and administrators that to those much is given much is expected. Parents give and trust their most precious children with them. Parents in return expect our children to be taught, nurtured and cared for. Children will make mistakes; the key is how adults in schools help that child and teach him/her right from wrong.

I thank you again for the opportunity and hope today's hearing produces fruitful ideas and recommendations that become policies in Minnesota.

With much appreciation,

Idil Abdull – Somali Autism Mom