



Dvortcsak Speech and Language Services

February 25, 2021

RE: SB 236-Eliminating suspension and expulsion

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the board. My name is Anna Dvortcsak, I am a speech and language pathologist, autism specialist, and president of Dvortcsak Speech and Language Services, Inc. My area of expertise is working with children with social communication challenges including ASD and their families. I am writing to support the elimination of suspension and expulsion.

Expulsion and suspension are not effective interventions to address challenging behaviors (Research listed on the America's Promise Alliance link below). These actions do not teach appropriate behavior and they deny the child the opportunity to access the benefits of education. As listed in the research summary on the America's Promise Alliance link there is literature that illustrates that not only are expulsion and suspension ineffective in changing behavior they actually may serve to reinforce the child's use of the challenging behavior and lead to negative student outcomes.

The reason these actions reinforce the behavior is because children use challenging behavior for a reason, to have their needs met. Examples to illustrate this idea come from children I have worked who do not want to be at school. The reason they do not want to be at school may vary, some examples include difficulty understanding the task, feeling scared at school, feeling overwhelmed from the sensory stimuli, or incompetent the consistent factor is that all are unable to communicate their needs or feelings to the teacher or ask for help. In these situation the child's goal is to leave the class. In order to have this need met the child may hit, scream, throw things, or use a behavior that in the past has been successful in giving them the desired outcome of leaving school. When the child is removed it teaches the child to use this behavior to have their need met. That is not what we want to teach the child and it will not lead to better school function or behavior. These examples, and the research illustrate that punishment is not an effective tool for changing behavior.

What is effective in changing behavior is a positive behavior support model. With this model one is task with understanding why the challenging behavior occurs. The next step is to use strategies to help the child learn to communicate their needs using

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appropriate behavior. The article below by Bradshaw and colleagues provides data on the positive effects of an alternative method of training educators to use positive behavioral interventions to effect change in behavior and increase participation in learning. There are many more research studies that illustrate the positive outcomes of this model. In order to help all children succeed at school training should be provided to all teachers and staff around positive behavior supports, how to complete a functional behavior assessment, and resources should be provided to enable the teacher to follow through with the behavior plan. If a child is suspended or expelled from school we will not be providing them the public education to which they are entitled rather they will be excluded.

It is also important to note that use of challenging behavior to communicate is more prevalent with children with special needs, children who may be sleep deprived, hungry, or struggling academically. Public education should be equally accessible to all children if we exclude children who may not have had access to early education opportunities or who are unable to communicate their needs in an appropriate manner we are not providing equal opportunity to education.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am grateful to the individuals that have sponsored the bill and urge the senate to pass the bill to eliminate suspension and expulsion in education.

Sincerely,

Anna Dvortcsak, MS CCC-SLP

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References

<https://www.americaspromise.org/opinion/link-between-suspensions-expulsions-and-dropout-rates#:~:text=A%20preponderance%20of%20research%20also%20shows%20that%20su%20pensions,and%20can%20push%20students%20out%20of%20school%20altogether.>

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Bradshaw, Catherine P.; Mitchell, Mary M.; Leaf, Philip J. (2010), Examining the Effects of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Student Outcomes: Results from a Randomized Controlled Effectiveness Trial in Elementary Schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, v12 n3 p133-148