

# Suspending suspension

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Every day hundreds of students are suspended from school for petty misdemeanors and insignificant offenses. Although suspension was once considered a positive practice that promoted good behavior, this punishment is often exercised unjustly, reinforcing discrimination against minorities and students with disabilities.

A study by the New York Civil Liberties Union showed that about 450, 000 suspensions were given between 1999 and 2009, nearly double the rate of the previous decade. In Texas, a survey showed that 60 percent of students were suspended between seventh and twelfth grade, many more than once. Recently, in Minnesota, 52, 652 suspensions resulted in 110, 033 missed school days. “ We can fill over 4, 500 classrooms with the students who were suspended at least once last year,” said Angela Ciolfi, an advocate for the educational rights of children and author of a recent study. For many students who are constantly suspended, this practice is not a punishment. Repeatedly suspended students often come from troubled homes with limited parental supervision.

After being sent home, they are free to do as they please. Suspension is simply a way to avoid school - a reward for their bad behavior. Also, when students are given assignments to make up during their suspension, these are not evaluated, but become an automatic zero. There are “ shockingly grim statistics about students never being able to catch up with schoolwork, dropping out of high school,” says Johanna Miller, who cowrote a study on suspensions in New York City schools. Lately, suspensions are being given at an alarmingly high rate for surprisingly minor offenses, such as not completing homework or being late to class.

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This inspires anger and rebellion in students, who feel they have been treated unfairly. In perhaps the most ironic case, 2, 500 suspensions were given in Minnesota as punishment for missing school. Minority students and those with disabilities are suspended more often, for lesser offenses, and for more time overall. Over 65, 089 suspensions last year were given to students with disabilities. Children suffering from ADD, dyslexia, and ADHD are often sent out of the room for not paying attention or disrupting class, even though this is because of their disability. African-American students received 53 percent of all suspensions, and black children with disabilities made up 50 percent of the disabled suspension rate.

The ratio of suspensions for black boys to white boys is three to one, while black girls are four times as likely to be suspended as white girls. In a Minnesota survey, African-Americans accounted for 40 percent of suspensions, despite constituting only 10 percent of the student body. Despite many reassurances to the contrary, racism still seems pervasive in schools, and it's unfair and unjust to punish disabled children for "misbehavior" that they cannot control. Continually removing students from school has harmful emotional effects that often impact the rest of their lives. Students who have been suspended may develop the belief that they are worth less than other students. They gain a reputation as troublemaking, disobedient kids who will never amount to anything.

They develop low self-esteem and often become depressed or angry. But instead of trying to help them, the school system often punishes them, adding to the resentment they already feel. They also miss out on the benefits of participating in class and interacting with peers, which teaches

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essential communication skills. They grow to hate the education system, which vastly increases high school dropout rates. One study revealed that over two-thirds of a group of imprisoned high school freshmen in Baltimore had been suspended in middle school. Suspension more than triples the chance of dropping out of high school.

Admittedly, at times the only choice is to remove a student from the classroom. But this can be done without suspension. Other effective disciplinary methods include phone calls to parents, sending students to another classroom, or detention before or after school. A better alternative to sending students home is in-school suspension, where they stay in the principal's office during the suspension period and receive supervision to ensure they complete class assignments and don't fall behind. One might argue that suspension shows other students that punishments for misbehavior are real and severe, but these alternatives will serve that purpose even better than out-of-school suspensions, which for some students are like bonus vacations.

Additionally, to make sure discipline is doled out fairly and without race discrimination, for specific incidents there should be predetermined punishments. It would also be helpful for students with disabilities if teachers received more instruction on how to address their specific needs, allowing them to share equally in the benefits of the classroom environment. The issue of unjust suspension is an ever-growing problem. It is the responsibility of students and parents to draw attention to this rising injustice. Anti-suspension views must be aired at school board meetings, and it is the duty of the victims to publicize unfair treatment.

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Banning students from learning environments and causing them to fall behind is a waste of time for both schools and students. It's time to stand up against suspension in schools and fight these unfair penalties.