

Susan Providence
3rd Grade Teacher & Math Specialist
Saint Paul Public Schools
Battle Creek Elementary School

Currently, in Minnesota, our Black and Brown students are significantly behind their White Peers in academics, as shown by the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments data (MCA) that resulted in an Achievement Gap. If our goal is to help close this achievement gap; students need to be in a school, where they can learn. Therefore, suspension cannot solve the problem, especially in the early grades.

As a classroom teacher, I agree that there needs to be consequences for inappropriate behavior, and there needs to be a level of accountability. However, suspension cannot be the only solution. Educators believe that every student, whatever their color, background, or zip code, has the right to learn in a supportive environment—one that respects their humanity, upholds their dignity, and responds fairly to mistakes and missteps. However, zero tolerance and other exclusionary school discipline policies contradict these beliefs and instead, we are pushing kids out of the classroom at record rates. Statistics have shown that students as young as five have been suspended. Suspension results in millions of days of instructional time. The findings underscore that suspending students does little to reduce future misbehavior for the disciplined students or their peers, nor did it result in improved academic achievement for peers or perceptions of a positive school climate. Plus, the more severe the exclusionary discipline, the greater its negative effects were on a student's future academic performance, attendance, and behavior. Therefore, we must find a solution in which to help keep students stay in school, especially our younger students. Let's work on providing mental health support, and Restorative practice support that will help our students to build healthy relationships and repair harm they might have caused. Because it is difficult to build back up something once it is broken down. Let's work together to find a solution.