

Out-of-School Suspensions Harm Students Experiencing Homelessness



“Out-of-school suspensions are counterproductive. [School officials say that] we’re seeing you, and we notice that you are having problems in school, so to fix this problem ... we’re going to send you out of school. It just makes no sense.”

—Lyric

LYRIC’S STORY

Lyric loved school, despite all the obstacles she faced growing up. She was living in a homeless shelter by 5th grade. The city forced her and her mother out of her grandmother’s home because of her mother’s compulsive hoarding, rendering the home unsafe and uninhabitable.

She was homeless from that time in elementary school through high school. Lyric and her mom primarily stayed in shelters and sometimes spent nights in motels. Now almost 21, she works to advocate for youth who are experiencing many of the things she lived.

Lyric was physically abused by her father, who was never really present in her life. While her mother was present, her mother’s depression and physical disability left Lyric to manage her own life more often than not.

Facing hunger, no home, neglect, bullying, abuse and stress, Lyric received more than 30 suspensions over the course of her schooling — for talking back, talking too much, being tardy, and giving too much “attitude” toward her teachers. “I needed help. I was always told that I was being too loud and talking back, getting into arguments.” She also left the school campus once to escape bullies, which led to her being expelled. “I hit my breaking point and left. I walked out of the school. My principal said, ‘You need to get it together; you have to do better for yourself.’ He never asked me why, what made me leave.”

Lyric’s grades were strong, especially in English, and she loved sports and music class, but out-of-school suspensions set her back overall, particularly in math. “I struggled with math the most. When it came to math class, I was two grades behind. Even when I told them I was struggling because I didn’t know what was going on, they [teachers] thought it was an excuse.”

RECOMMENDED SOLUTION

Texas should **keep students who are homeless in school** by eliminating suspension as a disciplinary option, except in very serious situations, and should create incentives to graduate by eliminating barriers to higher education.

TEXAS STATISTICS

Texas students who are homeless are **twice as likely** to be referred to In-School Suspension, **2.5 times more likely** to be suspended from school, and **5 times more likely** to be referred to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program.

In the 2015-16 Texas school year, **Black girls** received **41% (43,771 out of 108,005)** of OSS actions for girls, but represented only **13% (325,893 out of 2,580,992)** of the population of girls.

Black children, boys, and students with special education needs are pushed out of class **at unequal rates compared to their peers.**

Out-of-school suspensions are discretionary — the reasons for removal are outlined in each school district's Student Code of Conduct, but these suspensions **are not required by law.**

THE IMPACT OF SUSPENSIONS ARE GREAT AND COSTLY



Missed Classroom Time

When children are removed from class, they lose important learning time.



Difficulty for Families

School removals can cause stress for families.



Ineffective

Suspensions do not change student behavior.



Costly for School Districts

When students are removed from class, school districts lose Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds.



Creates Mistrust

When children are excluded from class, they begin to lose faith in a system that seems to punish them and their peers randomly and without regard for the underlying cause of the behavior.



Negative School Climates & Lower Overall Academic Achievement

The use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions does not improve student achievement or overall school climate.



Early Labeling

Students who are removed from their classrooms may feel as though they have been labeled as “bad” or “problem” children.

“ I guess teachers sometimes think kids are hopeless...and that they don't want to be in school so why try with them. ... You should still be trying. ”
—Lyric

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