To encourage the limited use of suspension, expulsion and other punishments that remove students from instruction; and offer recommendations for alternative methods to address school discipline.

Time out of school has huge implications for student achievement and future success. “Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out \[of high school\], from 16 percent for those not suspended to 32 percent for those suspended just once” (Losen & Martinez, 2013, p. 1). Certain discipline measures also funnel youth into the juvenile justice system and increase their risk for future incarceration.

Data released in 2014 by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights indicates that there are huge disparities in school discipline among the nation’s middle and high schools. On average, black students are suspended and expelled from school “at a rate three times greater than white students.” Although they represent only 16 percent of the student population, black students represent 32–42 percent of those suspended or expelled. In addition, students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive out-of-
school suspensions (13 percent) than students without disabilities (6 percent). Suspension rates for all students continue to grow since the 1970s with nearly 3.5 million students having been suspended at least once during the 2011–2012 school year.

Research demonstrates that many suspensions are the result of minor infractions of school rules, such as violating dress codes, truancy, excessive tardiness, cell phone use, loitering, or classroom disruption (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2013). Nonetheless, many schools and districts have reduced or eliminated suspensions, which suggests “factors controlled closely by the schools influence the high rates and observed disparities in suspensions” (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 36). Large districts such as Baltimore and Los Angeles have fostered effective school leadership and positive changes at the school level and reduced suspension rates as a result. Some of these district-level factors include “whether or not schools’ discipline disparities are remedied, conducting careful selection and training of principals, providing support for teacher and leadership training, initiating changes to the school discipline code of conduct, and providing the specific behavioral supports and services that students with disabilities need” (Losen, et al, 2015).

If done well, efforts to revise school discipline policies should have a positive impact on school climate, keep students engaged in learning, improve student achievement and graduation rates, and increase students’ chances for lifelong success. However, principals and assistant principals cannot make these changes in policy on their own and will need significant assistance and resources from states and districts to enact these recommendations.

**NASSP GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The principal’s primary responsibility is to foster a safe, orderly, warm, and inviting environment where each student comes to school ready and eager to learn.

Any strategy to reduce suspensions and expulsions must be part of a comprehensive schoolwide effort to improve the quality of classroom instruction accompanied by efforts to create conditions where students are meaningfully engaged in the school community and come to school ready to learn.

Schools have a responsibility to model and teach students methods of exerting authority and modifying behavior that are constructive, humane, and provide opportunities for growth.

School discipline should be reasonable, timely, fair, age-appropriate, and an appropriate response to a student’s violation of the district code of conduct.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL AND STATE POLICYMAKERS**

- Require states that do not already do so to publicly report disaggregated data annually by school level, race, ethnicity, income status, and gender that includes the number of students suspended, the number of incidents, the reasons for out-of-school suspensions, and the number of days out of school.
Provide funding to assist schools in recruiting and retaining school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to support school-based interventions and the coordination of services.

Authorize a competitive grant program to assist states and districts in implementing an early warning data system to identify struggling students and create a system of evidence-based and linguistically and culturally relevant interventions.

Ensure that educator evaluation systems measure a principal's ability to develop and maintain a positive school culture that includes not only the tone of a school, but also school safety, enthusiasm of students and faculty, and the level of connectedness with the community.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT LEADERS**

- Review the joint guidance on nondiscriminatory administration of school discipline released in January 2014 by the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education.

- Evaluate the district code of conduct and all schools’ discipline data to ensure that out-of-school suspension and expulsion are not overused or disproportionately administered to certain student subgroups.

- Engage principals, teachers, parents, and students in the development and scheduled periodic reviews of the code of conduct.

- Ensure that suspension and expulsions are measures of last resort in the code of conduct and use them only if it is necessary to preserve the safety of other students and staff.

- Include suspensions and expulsions as part of an early warning data system to target supportive interventions for at-risk students.

- Implement multitiered systems of support that encompass prevention, wellness promotion, and interventions that are based on student need and promote close school-community collaboration.

- Examine each school's distinct problems and any contributing factors before selecting which evidence-based interventions to use and how progress will be measured.

- Focus on prevention and effective interventions as responses to disciplinary issues, including Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, social and emotional learning, peer juries, restorative justice processes, diversion, mentoring, mental health counseling, restitution, and community service programs.

- Provide adequate funding for alternatives to out-of-school suspension such as afterschool tutoring and additional coaching from teachers, afterschool detention, Saturday school, parent conferences, in-school suspension, and alternative programs, which will ensure students spend more time in school, have increased adult attention and supervision, and ensure academic success.

- Develop policies to ensure that students who have been suspended have opportunities to make academic progress while excluded and offer them a reasonable amount of time to make up homework, tests, quizzes, projects, or other required work that was missed.
Provide principals and teachers with ongoing, job-embedded professional development on child and adolescent development, culturally responsive classroom management, conflict resolution, and de-escalation approaches that decrease classroom disruptions and the need for disciplinary sanctions.

Develop due process procedures for appeal of schools’ disciplinary actions and ensure that they are clearly communicated and applied equally to all students.

Establish clear guidelines for school personnel and school resource officers regarding the role of each in responding to disciplinary infractions, and ensure that police involvement is limited to situations when it is necessary to protect students and staff.

Ensure that school resource officers receive specialized training to help them become a part of the school community and contribute to a safe, orderly, and inviting school environment.

Establish clear guidelines for school personnel and school resource officers regarding the role of each in responding to disciplinary infractions, and ensure that police involvement is limited to situations when it is necessary to protect students and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Place a focus on preventing discipline and behavioral problems.

Ensure that out-of-school suspension is used only if it is necessary to preserve the safety of other students and staff.

Administer a schoolwide climate survey of students, parents, and school personnel on a regular schedule that measures the degree to which collaborative leadership exists; the personalization of the school environment; and the strength of the school’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment—factors that lead to a supportive learning environment and increased student achievement.

Review discipline data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability to identify concerns and monitor progress of school discipline reforms.

If disparities in discipline data are identified, commit the school to a plan of action to ameliorate the root cause of these disparities.

Involve students and school personnel in establishing expectations for student and staff conduct and the consequences for noncompliance.

Engage families and community partners in fostering the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional success of each student.

Provide students and their families access to the discipline policies and student code of conduct in an easily understandable, age-appropriate format that makes clear the sanctions imposed for specific offenses.