



MT

Livingston

Lisa Rosberg

Park County Schools

12/04/2025 06:34 PM

Subject: School/Education Funding v Consolidation

Comment: As you meet to discuss the future of school funding in our great state, I implore you to make students the priority. My first point concerns a bill in the last legislative session suggesting we close all of the feeder schools & have only the larger schools in each county. In Park County that will not work for two reasons. Though it would simplify things on paper, the reality would be messy & in my opinion, result in many more families choosing to homeschool. Livingston does not have the space or the staff to consolidate the county & the bus rides for the youngest students would violate current Montana Code. My second point is that the state needs to figure out a more appropriate funding model. Too many funds are left to the Governor's discretion. Schools must be a priority. Why can we not support schools with funds from the lottery as was originally proposed? There must be a better way to serve our children effectively & maintain the strong tradition & integrity of our rural schools.

	MT	Whitefish	Terry Marasco	Self	12/13/2025 01:15 PM
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Subject: Ammendemnst to Draft Report

Attachments:

Comment: Amendments to Draft !EEWG Draft

 [VIEW ATTACHMENT 1](#)

Recommendations to Amend Montana Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group Draft Policy Recommendations

By Terry Marasco, 12/2025

1. Insert add a, p. 7:

Eliminating the Trades vs. College Stigma

Core Issue: Schools have reinforced a false hierarchy—college = success, trades = fallback—limiting student opportunity and worsening skilled workforce shortages. Trades are not an alternative to college—they are often a direct pathway into it, with strong earnings and less debt. Expected Results: Higher graduation rates, increased enrollment in high-demand fields, reduced student debt, stronger local economies, and equal respect for all post-secondary pathways.

Root Causes:

Historical tracking, college-for-all messaging, outdated perceptions of trades, lack of visibility into modern high-tech skills, and unclear advancement pathways.

What Changes the Narrative:

- A. Integrate CTE with college-prep (no separate “tracks”).
- B. Show clear pathways from high school → apprenticeship → degrees → leadership/ownership.
- C. Modernize facilities and instruction to reflect today’s technology-driven trades.
- D. Expand paid, work-based learning (internships, youth apprenticeships, capstones).
- E. Publicly share earnings and outcomes data to counter myths with facts.
- F. Shift counseling language from “college OR career” to “multiple pathways to success.”
- G. Deepen industry partnerships that visibly demonstrate wages, advancement, and tuition-paid options.

2. Insert second bullet point, P10 Instructional Materials design features.

A. Libraries across the state at the community, school, university, and the state need to be connected for seamless access to data and information for every student in the state in every school. While AI can access data and information, it is prone to errors. Connecting original source material in an efficient and real-time manner assures that students have factual content available. Technology provides the mechanism to achieve this today.

Additionally, Montana schools can partner with search engine companies to deliver appropriate content in real-time (see Google Scholar <https://scholar.google.com/>). Also, programs such as Ted Talks provide rich, thought-provoking perspectives that convey, very often, what the future of society will look like.

(https://www.ted.com/talks/akram_awad_will_ai_make_humans_useless)

B. Beyond Montana's resources are volumes of content available, such as **free open courses** from validated institutions such as Stanford University, Harvard University, MIT University, and worldwide sources such as the Max Planck Institutes (<https://www.mpg.de/institutes>). This rich resource base needs to be integrated into one channel accessible to all Montana schools for easy access. (**Structured Free Courses** Alison — Foundation & High-School-Level Physics

- *Physics: Motion and Gravity* — principles of motion, forces, gravity, momentum. [Alison](#)
- *High School Physics: Force and Energy* — work, energy, conservation, dynamics)

3. Insert p.11 at public engagement design features, second bullet point.

- One of the challenges in Montana is the size of the state and the vast distribution of rural schools. It is recommended that rural as well as urban schools become community resource-based, which fosters community cohesion.


- Montana's public schools are more than classrooms—they are often the **last remaining civic institution** in our rural towns and a daily point of contact for families across the state. When we invest in schools as **community-based resource hubs**, we strengthen not only education, but workforce readiness, public health, and community stability.

Here are three key points for Montana:

- **First, community-based schools improve student outcomes by addressing real barriers to learning.**
When schools coordinate access to healthcare, mental health services, food support, and family resources, attendance rises, behavior improves, and graduation rates increase. Academic success follows stability.
- **Second, this model maximizes taxpayer investment rather than expanding bureaucracy.**
Community-based schools leverage partnerships with local providers, employers, and nonprofits. One coordinator can align services already funded through health, labor, and human services—delivering better results without duplicating costs.
- **Third, community-based schools strengthen Montana's workforce and rural economies.**
By integrating career pathways, apprenticeships, and employer partnerships, schools become talent pipelines for construction, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, energy, and the trades. Students stay, families stay, and communities remain viable.
- This approach works in **both rural and urban Montana** because it is flexible and locally driven. It respects community values, supports families, and keeps schools focused on learning—while recognizing that learning does not happen in isolation.

Community-based public schools are not a new program—they are a **better use of what we already have**. They deliver stronger outcomes for students, greater efficiency for taxpayers, and long-term returns for Montana's economy.

4. **Discussion Point** – While fully Independent Private Schools are generally exempt from public school mandates (curriculum, teacher certification, but must still follow general laws on safety, non-discrimination (race, creed, etc.), and local health codes, they are turning students into Montana's economy. While this may be a cultural problem, should there be a discussion on the subject?

	MT	Whitefish	Terry Marasco	Self	12/13/2025 11:41 AM
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Subject: School Discipline Reform

Attachments:

Comment: In my five years of serving as a guest teacher in Utah and now Montana, It is clear that discipline needs new avenues to achieve academic success for students. This paper (included) suggests ways to address the issue.

 [VIEW](#)
[ATTACHMENT 1](#)

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOR SCHOOLS

Terry Marasco

Submitted to the 2025 School Funding Commission, Montana Legislature

The historical methodology, disciplinary punishment, has the effect of immediately addressing the issue, but is not effective in keeping students engaged and academically successful nor correcting behaviors.

◆ Key Findings

1. Ineffective for Long-Term Behavior Change

- Punitive discipline (especially exclusionary measures) **does not reduce repeat misbehavior** or improve safety.
- Students who are suspended or expelled are **more likely to reoffend, disengage, and drop out**.
 - *Source: American Psychological Association Task Force on Zero Tolerance (2008)*

2. Negative Academic and Social Outcomes

- Suspended students lose instructional time and fall behind academically.
- Large-scale data (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2018) show a **strong link between suspension rates and lower achievement** at both student and school levels.
 - *Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR Data, 2018)*

3. Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Groups

- Black students, students with disabilities, and Native American students face **harsher punishments for similar infractions**.
- This contributes to the **school-to-prison pipeline**.
 - *Source: OCR Civil Rights Data Collection (2021); Skiba et al., Educational Researcher (2014)*

4. Alternatives Show Clear Gains

- **Restorative justice, PBIS, and trauma-informed practices** lower suspension rates, improve school climate, and reduce racial gaps in discipline.
 - *Example: Oakland Unified School District (CA) saw a **47% drop in suspensions** over five years using restorative approaches.*

- Source: Jain et al., *Urban Education* (2014)

Common Themes in Public-School Discipline Success Stories

1. Shift from Punishment to Support

- **Core idea:** Replace exclusion (suspensions, expulsions) with engagement and restoration.
 - **Practices:** Restorative justice circles, mediation, “success plans,” behavior education plans.
 - **Impact:** Major reductions in suspensions (20–74%), student arrests, and lost instructional days.
 - **Example:** Oakland USD saw a 74% drop in suspensions after implementing restorative circles.
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2. Data-Driven Decision Making

- **Core idea:** Use detailed data to identify disproportionalities, track progress, and inform policy.
 - **Practices:** Regular analysis of suspension, referral, and arrest data by demographics.
 - **Impact:** Targeted interventions reduced racial discipline gaps (e.g., Black male students in CPS).
 - **Example:** Broward County used arrest and suspension data to guide districtwide reform.
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3. Equity and Inclusion Focus

- **Core idea:** Address racial and socioeconomic disproportionality in discipline.
- **Practices:** Explicitly review race-based data, engage communities, align with equity goals.

- **Impact:** Improved fairness, belonging, and student trust.
 - **Example:** Madison (WI) reduced OSS by 40% while embedding racial equity into its Behavior Education Plan.
-

4. Relationship and School Climate Building

- **Core idea:** Prioritize relationships between staff and students to prevent misbehavior.
 - **Practices:** Restorative circles, advisory periods, positive recognition systems (PBIS).
 - **Impact:** Students report stronger connection and safety; behavior incidents decline.
 - **Example:** DCPS linked discipline reform with student “success plans” and saw up to 80% drops in chronic suspensions.
-

5. Staff Training and Support Systems

- **Core idea:** Equip teachers and administrators to manage classrooms and conflicts constructively.
 - **Practices:** Ongoing professional development in restorative practices, SEL, and trauma-informed care.
 - **Impact:** Increased consistency, buy-in, and sustained outcomes.
 - **Example:** Georgia’s PBIS framework success hinged on district-wide training and implementation coaches.
-

6. Whole-System Alignment and Leadership

- **Core idea:** Embed discipline reform into strategic plans, not as isolated initiatives.
- **Practices:** Superintendent leadership, board policy alignment, districtwide rollout.
- **Impact:** Sustainability and coherence across schools.

- **Example:** Broward County and Madison MMSD tied reforms directly to their strategic missions.
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7. Patience and Fidelity

- **Core idea:** Culture change takes 3–6 years of steady implementation and monitoring.
 - **Practices:** Pilot programs with scaling; fidelity checks; adjust based on data.
 - **Impact:** Long-term, measurable decline in exclusionary discipline and better school climate.
 - **Example:** Merced County's multi-year restorative justice rollout showed consistent improvement.
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8. Community and Family Engagement

- **Core idea:** Reform works best when students, parents, and local partners are co-creators.
 - **Practices:** Include families in policy design; partner with organizations like RJOY.
 - **Impact:** Higher trust, transparency, and local relevance.
 - **Example:** Oakland's collaboration with RJOY fostered long-term district buy-in and community ownership.
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In Summary

Successful districts treat discipline reform not as a rules change but as a **cultural transformation** — built on **data, relationships, equity, and shared responsibility**.

The most consistent metric of success: **keeping students in school, learning, and connected**.

Here are several well-documented success stories in public-school discipline reform, each showing how schools and districts shifted away from exclusionary punishment toward more supportive, effective approaches.

1. Broward County Public Schools (Florida)

**Broward County Public Schools
Administrative Discipline Matrix
Elementary - 2010/2011**

Reported to State	Incident Code	Incident	Prevention Intervention (Re-entry parent conference)/Consequence (Report on TERMS C26 Panel) - Minimum of Two	Collaborative Problem Solving Team (Child Study)	Threat Assessment Protocol	Confiscation (When Applicable)	Restitution (When Applicable)	School Specific Consequences	Loss of Privilege	Removal From Class (Less than 1 day)	Detention	In-School Suspension: 1-5 days	In-School Suspension: 6-10 Days	Out-of-School Suspension: 1-5 Days (Offer AES)	Out-of-School Suspension: 6-10 Days (Offer AES)	Mandatory Out-of-School Suspension: 10 Days	Recommendation for Emergency Behavior Change	Recommendation for Expulsion	Complete Immediate Notification Form (SIU)	Report to local Law Enforcement required
		Documentation on TERMS C26 panel is required for all violations requiring administrative action.																		
		Discipline of ESE/504 students with disabilities shall be in accordance with state and federal laws and School Board policies.																		
		LEGEND M = Mandatory action X = Initial punitive action (for 1st offense) A = Additional (progressive) action S = Incident codes reported to the State B = Recommendation for emergency behavior change																		
		Attendance Incidents																		
	ZL	Class Cut (Skipping)	M	A				X	A	A	A	A	A							
	ZM	Tardiness, Habitual	M	M				X	A	A	A	A	A							
	ZV	Truancy	M	M				X	A	A	A	A	A							
	ZG	Leaving Campus Without Permission	M	A								X	A	A						
	ZU	Out of Assigned Area	M	A				X	A	A		A	A							
		Rule Violation Incidents																		
	ZE	Dress Code Violation	M	A				X	A	A		A	A							
	ZB	Cheating- Major	M	A								X	A							
	ZF	School Rules Violation (Includes Classroom Rules)	M	A				X	A	A		A								
	ZP	Detention - Unserved	M	A				X	A	A	A									
S	ED	Electronic devices - offensive or unlawful use or publication				M								X	A	A			M	A
	ZV	Cell Phone Violation, Punitive action begins on the 2nd offense	M			M			X	A	A	A	A	A						
		Disruptive Incidents																		
	SB	Disruptive (Unruly) Behavior or Play	M	A				X	A	A	A	A	A							
	Q1	Disobedience/Insubordination	M	A				X	A	A	A	A	A							
	ZW	Defiance of Authority (See Definition)	M	M								X	A	A	A	A				
	SM	Cumulative Administrative Referrals (5 or more)	M	M								X	A	A	A	A				
	Q2	Profanity - use of insulting/Offensive Language	M	A				X	A	A	A	A	A							
	ZX	Profanity Directed Towards a Staff Member	M	M								X	A	A	A	A				
S	SG	Gambling	M	A		M						X	A	A					M	A
	ZI	Inciting a Disturbance	M	A								X	A	A						
S	SF	Passing and / or Producing Counterfeit Money	M	A								X	A	A					M	A
	ZH	Falsification/Misrepresentation (Lying, Forgery of signature)	M	A						X	A	A	A							
	ZC	Prohibited/Distracting Items - Possession/Use	M	A		M		X	A	A	A	A								
	ZI	Distribution/Sale of unauthorized Materials (Non-Criminal)	M	A		M		X	A	A	A	A								
S	Z2	Laser Device - Inappropriate Use	M	A		M								X	A	A	B		M	
S	GI	Gang Related Activity (See Definition)																		
	XA	Disruption on Campus (Minor)	M	A								X	A	A						
S	D0	Disruption on Campus (Major)	M	A										X	A	A			M	A
S	06	Trespassing	M	A								X	A	A					M	A
S	F9	False Fire Alarm/911 Call	M	A										X	A	A			M	A
		B- A Recommendation for Emergency Behavior Change: This applies when the student commits an offense for which a secondary student would receive a mandatory expulsion under School Board Policy 5896. Since the policy does not contemplate the expulsion of elementary students (except where noted), other disciplinary action may be taken (i.e., administrative placement into the Behavior Change program).																		

Revised 6/1/10

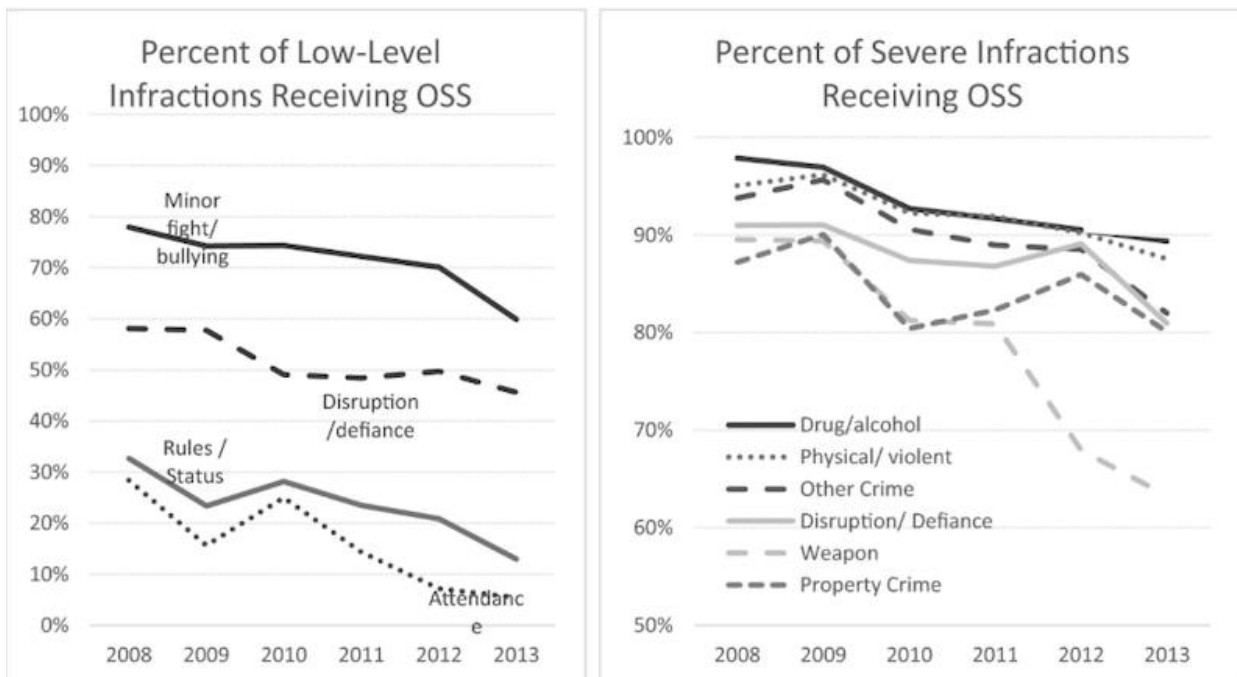
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- Beginning around 2011 under Superintendent Robert Runcie the district identified high levels of student arrests, suspensions and expulsions, and set out to change discipline culture. [Default](#)

- They engaged in data-analysis of discipline outcomes, pursued alternative models, and kept the aim of keeping each student “engaged in school every day.” [Default](#)
- The result: significant declines in out-of-school suspensions (OSS), arrests, and repeat discipline offenses. [Default](#)
- Why it works: strong leadership, data transparency, shift in mindset (from “punish and exclude” to “engage and support”).
- Tip for replication: Build the discipline reform into the district’s strategic plan; train staff on new practices; monitor data over time.

2. Chicago Public Schools (Illinois) — Restorative Practices





- A study found that implementing restorative practices (RP) in CPS led to an **18% reduction** in suspension days and a **19% decrease** in student arrests. [Brookings+1](#)
- Black male students especially benefited — since historically they had far higher suspension and arrest rates. [Brookings+1](#)

- Benefits included improvements in school climate (students felt more belonging and safety). [National Education Association+1](#)
 - Key components: consistent implementation across schools, training for staff, altering culture of discipline.
 - Tip: When introducing RP, ensure there are clear processes and supports (not just “let’s talk” but structured circles, follow-through, accountability built in).
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3. Oakland Unified School District (California) — Talk Circles / Restorative Models



- The program by Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) introduced “talk circles” where students and staff meet to repair harm, rather than immediately suspending. [The Atlantic Philanthropies+1](#)
- At one middle school pilot: suspensions dropped 74 % after two years of RJ implementation, violence referrals dropped 77 %. [YES! Magazine](#)

- The Oakland school board later adopted RJ as a system-wide discipline alternative to zero-tolerance. [The Atlantic Philanthropies](#)
 - Why this stands out: it shows a trauma-informed, relational approach can dramatically reduce exclusionary discipline.
 - Tip: These models take time and require staff buy-in, training, and monitoring to ensure fidelity (i.e., that circles aren't just lip-service).
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4. District of Columbia Public Schools (DC)

Grade band	Prohibited suspensions
Kindergarten through grade 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any reason aside from threatened or actual significant physical or emotional injury⁵ Absence or lateness Dress code violations
Grades 9 to 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Purely behavioral" infractions such as insubordinate behavior, defiance, disobedience, disrespect, or disruptive or rowdy behavior Non-school-related incidents that occur off of school property
All grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limits on consecutive days and cumulative days of out-of-school suspensions Avoid automatic suspensions unless required by law

D.C. Policy Center | dcpolicycenter.org

- DCPS adopted a policy that **prohibits additional out-of-school suspension (OSS) days** unless there is a "success plan" for the student, shifting from purely punitive to supportive. panoramaed.com
- Outcomes: • 21% decrease in students with 6+ OSS days • 61% decrease in students with 11+ OSS days • 80% decrease in students with 16+ OSS days. panoramaed.com
- Also, students reported stronger feelings of safety and connection, especially in 6th grade—a key transition year. panoramaed.com
- Why effective: linking discipline reform with student-support systems (check-ins, connection, early intervention) rather than just removing students.
- Tip: Focus on transition years (e.g., entering secondary school) where behavior and belonging are vulnerable.

Key Lessons Across These Success Stories

- Reduce exclusionary discipline** (suspensions, expulsions) and provide alternatives that keep students engaged.
- Focus on relationships and belonging:** when students feel connected, they misbehave less.
- Use data:** rigorously track suspensions, referrals, arrests, student-engagement metrics to monitor progress.

- **Consistent implementation:** half-measures don't work—successful programs are implemented district-wide, with training, monitoring and follow-through.
- **Equity lens:** many programs explicitly target racial/ethnic disparities in discipline (e.g., Black male students).
- **Support rather than just punish:** adding support systems (check-ins, alternative programs, restorative processes) makes a difference.

Here are several more school-district discipline-reform success stories — including what they did, what they achieved, and key insights for replication.

1. Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), Wisconsin





What they did

- Under Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham (starting 2013) MMSD moved away from a heavy reliance on exclusionary discipline (suspensions/expulsions) toward a “progressive & restorative” approach. [Default+2Default+2](#)
- They created the **Behavior Education Plan (BEP)** and adopted a “Progressive Discipline” model: fewer automatic suspensions, more focus on relationship-building, social-emotional learning, teacher training, and restorative practices. [madison.k12.wi.us+2madison.k12.wi.us+2](#)
- They explicitly addressed racial disproportionality: for example, reviewing how Black students were suspended at much higher rates. [Default](#)

Outcomes

- From the 2013–14 to 2014–15 school year, out-of-school suspensions (OSS) fell by **over 40%** in MMSD. [Default](#)
- Days of lost instruction due to OSS dropped by ~1,900 in that year (equivalent to “more than 10 full school years” of instruction regained) in one district snapshot. [Default](#)

Key take-aways for implementation

- Engage community, parents, students, and staff early in redesigning discipline policy. [Default](#)

- Align discipline reform with instructional mission: view behavior & learning as intertwined, not separate. [Default](#)
- Invest professional development: teacher training on classroom management, social-emotional learning, restorative practices matters. [Default](#)
- Implementation takes time; mindsets and culture shifts are as important as changing the rulebook.

Note / caveat

- While OSS rates dropped significantly, MMSD reports it still faced challenges with disproportionality (e.g., Black students still disproportionately suspended). [Default](#)
 - Some critics argue the new system may have unintended consequences. [Badger Institute](#)
-

. Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), Florida



What they did

- Starting around 2011, under Superintendent Robert Runcie, BCPS took a hard look at the data: high levels of arrests, suspensions, expulsions. [Default](#)
- They built discipline reform into the strategic plan with goals such as “each child engaged every day”, and sought to deploy more support staff (social workers, counselors) rather than simply punish. [Default+1](#)

Outcomes

- The case-study reports large declines in student arrests, behavior referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and recidivism in discipline incidents. [Default](#)

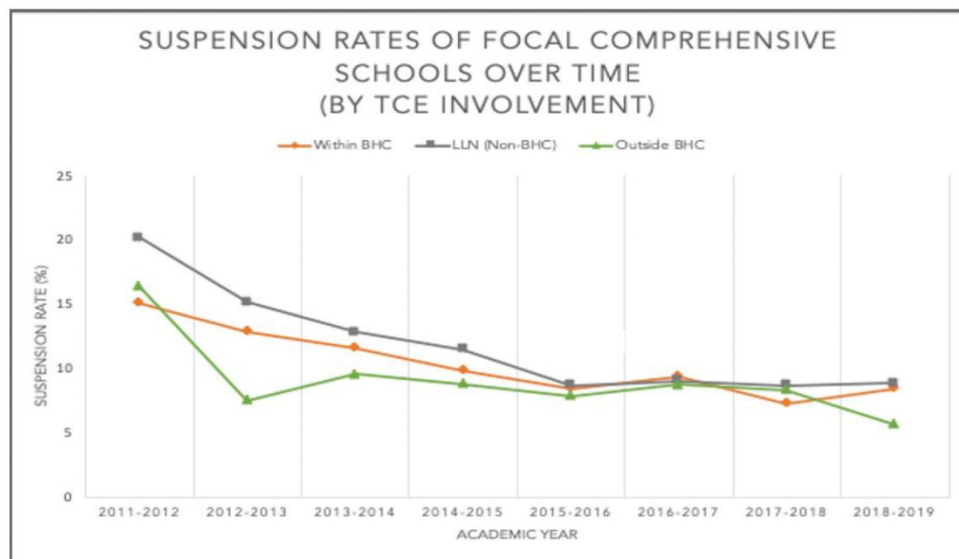
Key take-aways

- Use data early: identify problem areas (e.g., disproportionately high suspensions, arrests).
- Align discipline reform with broader equity goals (closing achievement gaps, reducing “school-to-prison pipeline”).
- Provide relief valves: reform doesn't simply remove consequences; it adds supports.
- Ensure system-wide coordination: policy, training, resources must align.

Considerations

- The case-study is from 2016; ongoing fidelity and sustainability matter.
- Some reform elements may interact differently in different school contexts (urban vs rural).

3. Merced County (California) – High Schools using Restorative Justice



What they did

- Schools in Merced piloted the use of restorative justice (RJ) practices: mediation, “peace circles,” dialogues instead of automatic suspension/expulsion for many infractions. calhealthreport.org+2healthinpartnership.org+2
- The pilot covered six high schools in the county; the study (Health Impact Assessment) examined education, mental-health, discipline, climate outcomes. healthinpartnership.org+1

Outcomes

- The HIA found that if RJ is properly implemented, suspensions can drop **20-40%** compared with zero-tolerance approaches. hia.communitycommons.org+1
- In the pilot, implementation yielded meaningful reductions: e.g., several hundred fewer suspensions in the year studied. Pew Charitable Trusts

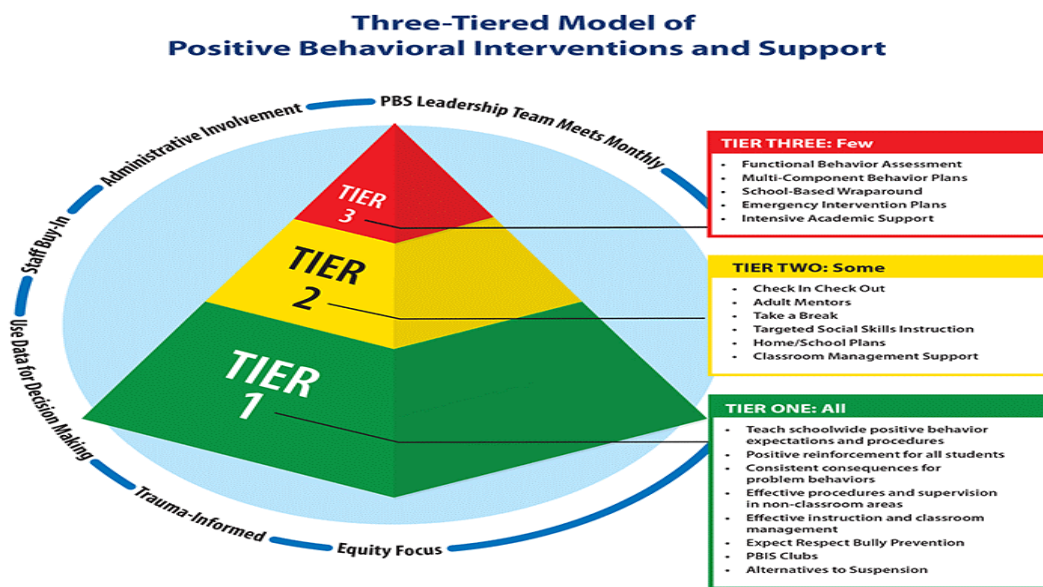
Key take-aways

- RJ can reduce exclusionary discipline when done with fidelity: it's not just talk, but structured processes, skilled facilitation, support services.
- RJ connects to student well-being, mental health, school climate — not just rule enforcement.
- Allow time for implementation: the Merced study suggests 3-6 years for full adoption. hia.communitycommons.org
- RJ works best when paired with supports (counseling, social/emotional learning, classroom management practices).

Considerations

- RJ demands commitment: staffing, time, training, shifts in mindset. The quick fix doesn't exist.
- Schools must still maintain clear boundaries and accountability; RJ does not mean no consequences. Misapplication may lead to criticisms of "soft discipline."
- Implementation context matters: school size, resources, staff buy-in all impact success.

4. Georgia Department of Education / Districts in Georgia (PBIS Implementation)



Panther Expectations

	Hallways	Cafeteria	Restroom	Bus	Playground	Library
P Pride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take care of others' work Keep the halls clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean up after yourself Place all trash in the trash can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean up after yourself Wash hands with soap and water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be a good example to others Be kind to others and personal property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be a problem solver Use equipment appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handle books with care Return your books on time
A Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk quietly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a quiet voice Use good table manners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a quiet voice Allow for privacy for each person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a quiet voice Use appropriate language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use positive and appropriate language Invite others to join in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use your library voice
W Wise Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to your destination quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use time to eat wisely Eat your own food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to class quickly Use water and supplies wisely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep belongings in your book bag Be ready for your stop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Line up at first signal Agree on rules before the game Stay in approved areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring your golden ticket Put things back in their proper place
S Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep hands, feet and other objects to yourself Walk on the right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk in line Stay seated until dismissed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep hands, feet, and other objects to yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remain seated until the bus stops Walk on and off the bus in a single file line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep hands, feet, and other objects to yourself Report problems and injuries to adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk calmly

What they did

- The Georgia Department of Education reports that "several Georgia districts have implemented PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports) district-wide and report significant decreases in discipline events." [Student Achievement Office+1](#)
- Example: In one district, bus referrals dropped 53%; suspension days reduced 24%. [Student Achievement Office](#)

Outcomes

- One article: In the 2021-22 year, 45 district schools were recognized for strong positive school climate via PBIS; 16 of them awarded "Distinguished" status. news.fultonschools.org

Key take-aways

- PBIS is a broad framework for teaching behavior expectations, recognizing positive behavior, establishing consistent systems. [ccboe.com+1](https://ccboe.com)

- Because PBIS is preventive (rather than reactive), it tends to yield decreases in office referrals and suspension incidents when well-implemented.
- Implementation support (coaches, training, district-level leadership) matters a lot. news.fultonschools.org

Considerations

- PBIS is not a silver bullet: fidelity of implementation, staff buy-in, adequate support are key. Some studies show mixed results if poorly implemented. [PBIS](#)
- PBIS works best when part of a larger ecosystem of discipline reform (including restorative practices, SEL, equitable discipline review).

5. Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), California



What they did

- OUSD adopted and expanded its restorative-justice model: talk circles, harm-repair processes, shifting from “punish & exclude” to “repair & involve.” [Cornell Law School+1](#)
- According to one article, Ferro High School (Fremont High) in Oakland: used to have very high suspension/drop-out rates; after RJ investment the number of students qualifying for college nearly tripled. [Cornell Law School](#)

Outcomes

- The article reports that incidents leading to suspension dropped dramatically in the RJ-expanded schools. [Cornell Law School](#)

Key take-aways

- RJ works when embedded system-wide, not just in isolated classrooms or schools.
- Leadership commitment and dedicated resources (including training and staffing) are critical.
- RJ requires cultural shift: from “what rules did you break?” to “what harm was done? how do we repair it? how do we prevent it next time?”

Considerations

- RJ isn’t just “no consequences” — the accountability piece must remain. Some schools struggle when RJ is implemented superficially or without adequate infrastructure.
- As with all reform, outcomes vary by context.

Summary Table of Key Practices

Practice Area	What Successful Districts Did
Data & Equity Lens	Reviewed discipline data (suspensions, referrals, arrests) by student demographics; explicitly targeted disproportionality.
Shift from Exclusion to Engagement	Reduced out-of-school suspensions; provided alternatives (in-school support, counseling, circles).
Proactive & Preventive Frameworks	Adopted frameworks like PBIS to teach behavior, set clear expectations, reward positives.
Restorative Practices	Embedded RJ: harm repair, circles, student voice, building relationships rather than only enforcing rules.
Professional Development & Support Staff	Equipping teachers, administrators, counselors with training; increasing support staff roles.

Practice Area	What Successful Districts Did
Alignment & Leadership	Tied discipline reform to broader strategic plan/mission; got leadership buy-in (board, superintendent).
Implementation Fidelity & Time	Recognized reform takes several years; implemented with fidelity, monitored, adjusted.
Community & Family Engagement	Involved families, community organizations, students in the design and feedback loops.

Madison Metropolitan School District (Wisconsin)

- This district adopted a “Progressive Discipline” model with less reliance on automatic suspensions and more on relationship-building, social-emotional learning, restorative practices. [Children's Defense Fund+2VTechWorks+2](#)
- Outcomes: In one year, out-of-school suspensions fell by more than 40%. [Children's Defense Fund+1](#)
- Key take-aways: Engage staff & families early; link discipline reform to instructional mission; invest professional development.
- Downloadable link: “Case Study on Reforming School Discipline, Equity and Justice: Madison Metropolitan School District Profile” from the Children’s Defense Fund. [Children's Defense Fund](#)

2. The California “Beyond Suspension Decline” Study (Multiple Districts including Rural)

- The report titled “Transforming School Discipline in California — Beyond Suspension Decline” covers 34 schools in 17 districts (urban/suburban/rural) across California. [beyondsuspensiondecline.org+1](#)
- It finds that reducing exclusionary discipline (suspensions/expulsions) is feasible when districts embed supportive practices like alternative interventions, restorative strategies, and address race/ethnic disparities. [beyondsuspensiondecline.org+1](#)

- Downloadable link: The full report is available via the California School Discipline Project site. beyondsuspensiondecline.org
-

3. A Rural Colorado Example: Lake County High School (Colorado)

- In a rural Colorado setting, the school leadership intentionally shifted culture: making behavior expectations explicit, ensuring proportional consequences, and supporting students rather than relying entirely on out-of-school suspension. [Collective Colorado](#)
 - While not providing specific numbers in the article, this example is valuable because it shows reform in a rural context (which often has fewer resources).
 - Suggestion: This case helps illustrate how discipline reform principles (clear expectations, proportional responses, supportive alternatives) can translate to rural settings.
-

4. Study of Rural Schools' Discipline Disproportionality (Southeastern U.S.)

- A study titled "Discipline Disproportionality in Rural Schools in the South" examined five rural schools in the southeastern U.S. and found that Black students were disciplined at higher rates, and principals attributed the causes to cultural mismatch, trauma, and mental-health issues. [ERIC](#)
 - This study highlights **challenge** more than success — but it still provides useful insight (what to watch out for/evaluate) in rural reform contexts.
-

5. Research on Implementation and Policy Reform

- A broader article "New Research Suggests Practical Ways to Make School Discipline, Access Equitable" describes findings across three districts (two large and one small ~3,000 students) about what works in lowering suspension and discipline-disparity rates. [Education Week](#)
- Key findings: Effective districts **(a)** made changes in district policy (not just school-by-school), **(b)** engaged teachers/unions and gave training and resources, **(c)** embedded discipline reform into broader mission of student well-being and academic success.
- Although it is not a "single district success story" in the same manner, it gives transferable lessons for why reform succeeds or fails.

Restorative practices and exclusionary school discipline: an integrative review,
Contemporary Justice Review, Pages 28-47 | Received 19 Oct 2021, Accepted 01 Dec
2022, Published online: 24 Apr 2023

ABSTRACT

This study used integrative review methodology to synthesize research on the relationship between school-based restorative practices and exclusionary discipline outcomes in the United States. Exclusionary discipline outcomes were defined as out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement. A literature search produced 5,764 publications, and 11 studies were included in the final sample. Peacemaking circles were the most common restorative practice implemented, and secondary analysis of school records was the most common method utilized. **Findings indicated that restorative practices are associated with reduced suspension rates, which suggest that school-based restorative practices are a promising approach to reducing exclusionary discipline outcomes.**

Subject: Insights from Kids' Education Yes (KEY) on adaptability

Attachments:

Comment: Dear Members of the Montana School Funding Interim Commission,

 [VIEW
ATTACHMENT 1](#)

Thank you for your ongoing work to evaluate and strengthen public school funding in Montana. On behalf of Kids' Education Yes (KEY), a nonpartisan, community-based advocacy group led by parents and business leaders in Great Falls, we appreciate the opportunity we have had to offer community perspective during this process. Attached is a letter of our continued observations and a priority area we hope the Commission will continue to focus on as the decennial study process continues. The work undertaken to date related to identifying components of high performing systems has been very informative. We believe Montana is primed and ready to continue to grow from this effort, and are writing to share one area we feel is critical to address in order for identified adaptations and change to be most successful.

Thank you for your continued service and leadership,

Jamie Marshall

Chair, Kids' Education Yes (KEY)

December 8, 2025

Dear Members of the Montana School Funding Interim Commission,

Thank you for your work to evaluate and strengthen public school funding in Montana. On behalf of Kids' Education Yes (KEY), a nonpartisan, community-based advocacy group led by parents and business leaders in Great Falls, we appreciate the opportunity we have had to continue to offer community perspective during this process.

Across Montana, districts are responding to student needs with personalized pathways, community and work-based learning, flexible schedules, and targeted interventions. These approaches are now standard expectations of 21st-century learning. Yet the funding structures that support them have not kept pace. Districts often rely on variances, waivers, short-term grants, or private partnerships to offer programs that families and educators already value. This reactive approach creates administrative burden, uncertainty, and inconsistent access for students.

As the Commission turns its attention to funding, we encourage continued consideration of a proactive, adaptive framework that supports innovation and adaptability while maintaining the high standards of education that Montana families trust and expect. The necessary flexibility in learning models that already exists should simultaneously be built into the funding mechanisms in ways that expand beyond requesting variances. Conversations about funding are especially important now. Adequate and stable revenue sources aligned with how and what students learn are critical for districts to implement and sustain high performing systems and learning models.

A modernized, adaptable funding framework would:

- Align funding with competency-based, blended, work-based, and community-connected learning.
- Reduce reliance on exceptions by embedding adaptability directly into statute or rule.
- Strengthen local control by giving districts predictable tools for long-term planning.
- Support rural and high-need communities, where flexible delivery models are essential to providing equal learning opportunities for all students.

Montana educators and communities are already demonstrating creativity and commitment. Innovation should not require workarounds. Our funding system should enable the learning approach student's need. Ensuring that every Montana student receives the best education requires that funds follow the best practices. School districts, their teachers, and local communities know what is best for their students; knowing they will receive sustainable and long-term adaptable funding means the funding follows the learning, not the other way around.

We respectfully urge the Commission to review what is constitutionally required for a quality education, consider the realities of 21st-century learning, and integrate sustainable adaptability into Montana's funding structures. Thank you for your leadership and dedication to Montana's children. We truly appreciate your service.

Sincerely,

Kids' Education Yes (KEY)
Great Falls, Montana



MT

Missoula

Grace Decker

Montana Advocates for
Children

12/14/2025 05:44 PM

Subject: Comment on Draft Recommendations**Attachments:****Comment:** To the Committee:

My name is Grace Decker, and I represent MAC, the Montana Advocates for Children.

Thank you for the time, thought, work, and deep listening you have invested in the important efforts of the School Funding Interim Commission. We are especially glad that the Commission has taken a serious look at our state's early learning programs, since the years from birth to 8 are the most formative on every level for later school success.

I have attached a comment from the MAC coalition, asking that the Commission include a recommendation to establish clear and sustainable pathways for blended delivery of early learning through partnerships with existing high quality community based programs. Blended delivery is widely used in states adopting early learning because it is fiscally smart, supportive of families, and responsive to the unique needs and resources of diverse school districts and communities. Please see the attached letter for more. Thank you.

 [VIEW
ATTACHMENT 1](#)



December 14, 2025

To the School Funding Interim Commission:

My name is Grace Decker, and I represent MAC, the Montana Advocates for Children, a coalition of organizations and stakeholders who call for a robust and coordinated system of early care and education that all Montana families can access.

Thank you for the time, thought, work, and deep listening you have invested in the important efforts of the School Funding Interim Commission. We are especially glad that the Commission has taken a serious look at our state's early learning programs, since the years from birth to 8 are the most formative on every level for later school success.

I was grateful for the opportunity to participate in a stakeholder meeting with commission members and appreciate the collaborative and constructive spirit of that discussion. MAC supports expanded programming for 4-year-olds as an important step toward access to appropriate early learning support for all students, and especially those who will benefit most, including dual-language learners and students with other challenging circumstances. The SFIC's recommendation to establish a voluntary, opt-in early learning program puts Montana in the good company of more than 40 other states who have established robust early learning programs.

However, **MAC strongly asks that the Commission add the recommendation that as Montana expands early learning, we create a clear, fair, and sustainable pathway for partnerships between schools and existing high-quality community-based providers of early learning.** Such partnerships would provide choice at the district level in communities where a long-established, quality early learning program like Head Start exist, for example; and would enhance parent choice in communities where parents need wrap-around services or care that may not be readily available at the school. National organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Bipartisan Policy Center report that such "blended delivery" models of early learning programming are the best way to enhance family choice and to offer community-appropriate solutions that make fiscally smart use of limited resources and minimize unintended but nevertheless real harm to a state's existing system of early care and education. In fact, almost every state that has adopted early learning has done so using at least some amount of blended delivery.

A great deal of work has already been done to envision what blended delivery could look like in Montana through the Stars Preschool initiative which piloted blended delivery in faith-based, community-based, and school-based classrooms, and could be used as a starting point for future efforts to include blended delivery as a recommended strategy to attain a voluntary opt-in early learning system that will serve as an excellent foundation for all students' success across their school years.

Thank you again for all the time and work you are committing to this Commission's important task, and thank you for your service to this state, our kids, and our future.

Sincerely,


Grace Decker, Director
Montana Advocates for Children
montanaadvocateschildren@gmail.com
406-830-0870

	MT	Dillon	Estee Aiken	MT AGATE	12/14/2025 10:01 AM
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Subject: AGATE Letter for SFIC

Comment: Thank you for accepting the attached public comment.

Attachments:

 [VIEW ATTACHMENT 1](#)



December 15, 2025, Public Comment

The Montana Association for Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE) appreciates the opportunity to engage with the Legislative School Funding Interim Commission as the funding formula is re-evaluated. Several AGATE board members have participated in public meetings and provided comments throughout Phase I of this work. Having read the Montana Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group Draft Policy Recommendations (December 2025), AGATE urges the commission to consider the following as the work moves into Phase II:

- Article X of the Montana constitution asserts “It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person.”
- Montana Code Annotated, Title 20, Chapter 9, Part 3 states, “(1) Pursuant to Article X, section 1, of the Montana constitution, the legislature is required to provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools throughout the state of Montana that will guarantee equality of educational opportunity to all,” which includes “(b) educational programs to provide for students with special needs, such as...(v) gifted and talented children, as defined in **20-7-901.**”
Furthermore, “(3) In developing a mechanism to fund the basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools and in making adjustments to the funding formula, the legislature shall, at a minimum, consider the following educationally relevant factors...(d) the needs of students with special needs, [including] gifted and talented children.”
- Administrative Rules of Montana 10.55.804 GIFTED AND TALENTED and 20-7-902 (1) MCA both state, “Districts shall provide educational services to gifted and talented students that are commensurate to their needs, foster a positive self-image, and create a supportive learning environment.”
- Title 20-7-902 (2) MCA further instructs, “A school district shall provide structured support and assistance to teachers in identifying and meeting the diverse needs of gifted and talented students and a framework for considering a full range of alternatives for addressing student needs.”

It is not only legally expected; it is imperative that gifted and talented students be explicitly included in Montana’s next funding formula, particularly in the context of the recommended areas of Pathways to Graduation and Learner Centered Design.

The board of AGATE appreciates the time and effort that is being invested in this very important work and welcomes the opportunity to discuss gifted and talented learners’ inclusion in the funding formula.

Sincerely,

Dr. Estee Aiken, board president