



FFLIC

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE?



FFLIC recommends that parents consider discipline rates and how many times the school reported a child to the police, which we call "school climate." It is important to look at the school culture and how the school views and treats children. While some information can give you hints as to what the climate is like (for instance, high suspension rates usually indicate stricter, more aggressive climates), numbers are not going to tell the whole story.

You will probably need to talk to the school, as well as ask other parents and students, including your child. Community conversation is critical, since many schools will say one thing and practice another. Is the school using a stricter approach, having children walk in lines and enforcing a silent lunch? These schools tend to view and treat children as enemies or criminals who need to be punished when they do not follow rules. They can be quick to call the police and involve law enforcement in matters that could and should be handled by the school. This is why these schools should be avoided if possible. Studies reveal that the long-term effects of strict policies, also known as "zero tolerance policies," do not make schools any safer, and likely have the opposite effect.

Alternatives to suspension

In contrast, some schools use alternatives to suspension. These are more positive approaches that focus on preventing misbehavior by building relationships and encouraging good behavior with clear expectation and rewards. This is known as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). When a child misbehaves, these schools tend to see the misbehavior as the problem, not the child, and to try to find the cause of the misbehavior and correct it. These schools might also use restorative approaches, which is a method of discipline focused on repairing the relationships between those harmed (for example, the target of a rumor) and those causing the harm (the students spreading the rumor).

Finding a supportive school

Parents can try to choose schools that utilize these practices, or encourage their schools to use them. You will probably need to ask around to other parents and students and to talk to your child because there is no data on which schools use PBIS and/or which use them correctly. Also, don't be afraid to talk to the school itself. Studies show that alternatives to suspensions like PBIS contribute to improved grades, so it's in the best interest of schools to use these tools. Additionally, these practices reduce the likelihood of your child being suspended, dropping out, or coming into contact with law enforcement.

For more info about PBIS:

Visit www.pbis.org and ask FFLIC about the "Parents in Leadership" Project.

[Need help advocating for your child?](#)

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