

**Promote Inclusion, Prevent Expulsion**

A Policy and Advocacy Action Plan

Ilsia Bonilla, Angie Edwards, Sarah Evans, Minda Ruba

School of Social Work, Southern Adventist University

SOCW-609-A: Advanced Social Policy

Dr. Nina Nelson

December 8th, 2022

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Topic of Focus.....	5
Policy Description.....	5
Policy Context.....	6
Importance.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Researching the Issue and Literature Review.....	8
Nature of the Current Policy.....	8
Contextual Factors.....	9
Legislation in Other States .....	10
Policy Impact.....	10
Future Direction.....	11
Presentation of the Brand and Support Mapping.....	12
The Brand.....	12
Opinions Across the State.....	12
Persuasive Arguments for Support.....	12
Legislative Allies and Detractors.....	15
Opposition.....	15
Plans to Form a Coalition.....	16
Media Campaign.....	17
Campaign Goals.....	17
Media Avenues.....	18

Media Content.....19

Implementation Steps.....19

Advocacy Plan.....20

Focus and Target Population.....20

Advocacy Strategies.....21

Inclusion of Target Population.....23

Potential Ramifications.....24

Potential Opposition.....25

Elected Officials to Approach.....26

Key Talking Points.....27

Progress Monitoring Plan.....30

Conclusion.....31

References.....32

Appendix A.....36

Appendix B.....38

Appendix C.....40

Appendix D.....41

Appendix E.....42

Appendix F.....43

Appendix G.....45

Appendix H.....46

### **Abstract**

Tennessee SB 2173/HB 2258 is a bill that addresses punishment found in grade schools. It prohibits Local Education Agencies (LEA) from suspending or expelling students in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade unless the student's behavior is a danger to the safety of other students or school personnel. The campaign created is meant to address this bill and promote the addition of three amendments to secure the future and well-being of grade school children and prohibit these practices. Research is showing that these exclusionary practices can lead to serious consequences in the future. Children in these stages are still growing developmentally, socially, and cognitively. By removing them from a setting that helps foster these developments, students are more likely to show repeated aggressive behavior and lower academic achievement. Some children will internalize the stigma and judgment surrounding these punishments which leads to repeated suspensions and expulsions. Statistics show that students who face these punishments are at higher risk for negative outcomes. These outcomes include dropping out, academic failure, and increased risk of incarceration. This campaign aims to use a variety of strategies to meet the goals set. Social media and other media outlets will be used to reach the targeted audience which is school staff and guardians of the children. This audience can assist the campaign in persuading legislators to vote in favor of the proposed amendments.

*Keywords:* children, school, discipline, expulsion, suspension, childhood, punishment, legislators

### **Topic of Focus**

Tennessee students in the lower grades, from pre-kindergarten through second grade, are currently being suspended and expelled for non-violent acts committed at school. The child and their family may suffer numerous negative consequences as a result. By the time they are nine years old, many US children are still learning to read, but more than one in ten urban-born children already has an expulsion or suspension on their scholastic records (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Their parents are also adversely affected because they must leave work to address the issue. All of these things are possible. This results in negative emotions from both the child and the parents, causing a rift in their relationship. At this age, students shouldn't be dismissed from school so swiftly but rather given the chance to prove themselves, get support to change their behavior, and carry on with their education, unless their actions endanger others.

### **Policy Description**

The policy chosen to be advocated for is Tennessee's SB 2173/HB 2258. This bill aims to prohibit Local Education Agencies (LEA) from suspending or expelling a student enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade unless the student's behavior endangers the physical safety of other students or school personnel. Students need to be allowed time for their fear, rage, or anxiety to pass, and then they must be given the chance to talk with a staff member and a legal guardian about their actions before being expelled or suspended. This policy is meant to protect pre-kindergarten through second graders from unnecessary disciplinary penalties. When a student acts out in a way that endangers other students, it also discusses a safety precaution for them. The policy's goal is to prevent overt disciplinary action for minor infractions while enabling staff members to deal with harmful behavior.

The removal of young children from school may have unforeseen repercussions, such as worsening behavioral disorders, a lack of interest in school, and a higher risk of dropout. Sending children home will disrupt their education, not address their behavioral issues, and be detrimental to the school's reputation. Suspension is the complete opposite of the guidance and communication that young children need. Additionally, these students are unnecessarily forced to miss out on social and educational opportunities. Parents, teachers, and counselors favor such regulations because they believe that problems need to be addressed rather than suppressed or ignored (Zulauf-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2020). Parents seek assurances that administrators at their children's schools will be held accountable for their actions and will not arbitrarily suspend students. Representatives from the state of Tennessee oppose the implementation of statewide sanctions, and representatives of other organizations favor keeping such issues local (Ragan & Cepiky, 2022).

### **Policy Context**

This bill failed in the s/c K-12 Subcommittee of the Education Administration on March 15, 2022, due to the strong belief that the government should not intervene in how schools dictate punishing a child (Ragan & Cepiky, 2022). This project aims to advocate for the reintroduction and passage of SB 2173/HB 2258 with the following three amendments. The first amendment the PIPE campaign proposes is that before suspending or expelling a student, LEAs consult with mental health specialists (such as psychologists or behavioral therapists). This will give LEAs the freedom to discuss what they think is best for the young student with a mental health professional. The second amendment would be to hold a workshop for teachers on emotional communication as well as how to recognize red flags that a child's home situation might not be ideal or if there are signs of trauma. This is so that teachers can better understand

why their students are misbehaving, how to better encourage their students, and how to help their students succeed in school. The third and final amendment is that after completing the workshop, teachers would have the opportunity to work in conjunction with mental health professionals on how to proceed with certain students who may be struggling in various ways.

### **Importance**

It is crucial to address this policy since it has an impact on the lives of young students. Instead of being disregarded, these students' issues need to be addressed. At this age, children should not be suspended or expelled since doing so has negative impacts on their emotional health, reduces their exposure to educational opportunities, and fails to address the underlying issue (Tanious, 2022). If students are expelled for misbehavior, they miss out on important educational opportunities and materials (Harris, 2022) which could result in students having worse outcomes, such as greater behavioral issues, dropouts later in life, and more interactions with the criminal justice system (Gilliam, 2016). This policy will also address the discriminatory treatment of minority children who experience suspensions at a higher rate than their white peers (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Due to its rationality and positivism, the Huttman's Strategy Analysis Model was the ideal theoretical framework to apply for this policy. This framework is a method that focuses on inquiries that analyze the needs addressed and the goal of the policy. Huttman's Principle Analysis Model analyzes the policy using a number of questions and sub-questions including: "What are the unfulfilled needs?"; "What are the goals and outcomes of this policy?"; "What are the values expressed in the policy?"; "What are the bases for support for this policy?"; "What is the level of resource scarcity in respect to the policy?"; and "What are the costs and benefits

related to this policy?” By responding to these questions about the policy's underlying implications, content, and impact on specific populations and their values, and the purposes of the policy are better understood.

### **Researching the Issue and Literature Review**

#### **Nature of the Current Policy**

HB 2258, accompanied by SB 2173, is an act to amend the Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1; Title 49, Chapter 10; Title 49, Chapter 2; Title 49, Chapter 5, and Title 49, Chapter 6, relative to the discipline of students in prekindergarten through grade two (pre-K–2). As of March 15, 2022, SB 2173/HB 2258 has failed to proceed in the s/c K-12 Subcommittee of Education Administration (Haston, 2022). This bill was then assigned to the General Subcommittee of the Senate Education Committee on March 23, 2022, but was not addressed due to the nays prevailing in the House on the dates prior.

This bill, sponsored by state representative Torrey Haris and senator Raumesh Akbari, was supported by data collected from the Tennessee Department of Education report cards. The most recent data available to the public is derived from 2020. In the state of Tennessee, 2,221 students in kindergarten through second grade were suspended, and 12 students were expelled, meaning the student was permanently removed from the school system (Tennessee Department of Education, 2022). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, data on suspensions and expulsions were not collected for the 2021 school year. There are about 333,700 students in Tennessee who identify as being in preschool through second grade (US Census Bureau, 2018). Due to this significant number compared to the actual amount of suspensions and expulsions, the K-12 subcommittee decided to vote against this bill. There may be a large gap in this data, but that does not exclude the importance of keeping the state’s youngest students in school.



To advocate for these students, change must happen from a macro perspective. From a young age, children are influenced by their environment and express their level of toxic stress through their behavior in the classroom (Hood, 2020). Positive reinforcements given to a child when they are young can lead to better results when the child is an adult. According to Gilliam (2016), children who face the consequences of expulsion or suspension are ten times more likely to drop out of school, experience academic failure, or potentially experience incarceration. In some areas, the expulsion rates for prekindergarten were about three times higher than those in grades K through 12 combined. On a larger scale, thousands of suspended or expelled young students may not be significant compared to the total in the state. But that does not neglect the social problem this bill could potentially address. Since the bill failed back on March 15, 2022, there are no updates for potential changes to the repeal.

### **Contextual Factors**

On March 3, 2017, an article was released from The Tennessean expressing concerns about the number of preschoolers suspended in 2016. Gonzalez (2017) describes how a lawyer in Memphis, Tennessee, questioned why so many young children are being suspended from school and what is causing them to be on the disciplinary track so early. Both national and state findings show that this is a major issue across the United States. Unfortunately, it can have more of an effect on certain populations than others. Data has shown that these disciplinary practices happen disproportionately to black children or children with disabilities. Children who are suspended or expelled at a young age are more likely to drop out or become incarcerated later. This led to Akbari's proposal for legislation to address this social issue. Senator Akbari introduced this bill in part to reduce the number of African Americans who go to jail or drop out of school (Gonzalez, 2017). Together, Senator Akbari and Senator Tate created the amendments HB 872

and SB 1394 and filed for their introduction to the House and Senate, respectively, in February 2017. This bill aimed to prohibit the use of suspension and expulsion among preschoolers and kindergarteners unless they endangered others. It stipulated that if done, the punishment could not be longer than three days. It was also said that laws and policies about discipline should be looked at and that guidelines should be made for other ways to deal with discipline problems (Rafael, 2018). The bill gained traction in the House and was later passed and enacted after being amended. This policy was a step in the right direction toward eliminating unfair discipline in the education system. In 2022, Akbari introduced HB 2258 to make changes to the previously enacted amendment.

### **Legislation in Other States**

Arkansas dealt with this problem by telling teachers what they need to do before they can use practices that exclude people. Some of these steps included documentation of the reported incidents, seeking observation and support from a specialist, and including parents in discussions. In 2015, Arkansas doubled its funding for the state's early childhood mental health consultation program. The state also revised its child care licensure to enhance the support given to children. They also plan to keep adding new tools and resources for teachers to learn with (Stegalin, 2018). Colorado's approach included mandated training regarding professional development, the implementation of action plans to address challenging behaviors in children, and the cultivation of positive relationships between teachers and students (Stegalin, 2018).

### **Policy Impact**

Current policy on childhood exclusionary discipline has led to some interesting results, such as 2,221 Tennessee students in kindergarten through the second grade being suspended in 2020 (Department of Education, 2020). This is a small example of what children all across the

United States are experiencing. These children are facing exclusionary discipline and are facing even worse risks. These children are having their routines interrupted by these punishments and risk falling behind (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Children who are suspended or expelled are ten times more likely to experience academic failure than their peers (Gilliam, et al., 2016). This demographic also has low graduation rates and college enrollment, which can mean a variety of things for their future (Bacher-Hicks, 2020). There is even a direct association between early suspensions and expulsions and imprisonment rates later in life (Malik, 2017). Unfortunately, this policy has had more effects on different populations. Certain groups are more at risk for suspension, meaning they experience these negative effects at a higher rate as well. Things like being big, black, boy, or disabled will make the risk of exclusionary punishment higher (Malik, 2017; Rausch & Skiba, 2006). By age 9, forty percent of black boys and fifteen percent of black girls are suspended or expelled (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Being disabled increased the likelihood of suspension by two, and being both black and disabled increased the risk (Rausch & Skiba, 2006). Students who belong to these subgroups are more likely to receive punishment. This means they also have a higher likelihood of experiencing negative impacts that result from this policy, such as academic failure or future imprisonment.

### **Future Direction**

One of the potential future possibilities for this policy is the question of what other alternatives there are to reprimanding a child in these grades that do not include the child being suspended or expelled from school. If it is understood why children in these grades are frequently suspended and the reasons for which they are suspended, it may be able to shed light on possible alternatives to suspension as a form of discipline. Concerns may also be raised about whether or not this kind of punishment singles out certain groups of people. The discrepancies in

disciplinary behavior that the children in these grades are facing will be helped to some extent by this measure. The long-term effects of this form of punishment on children are another potential angle of investigation that might be pursued in connection with this matter.

### **Presentation of the Brand and Support Mapping**

#### **The Brand**

The campaign is entitled Promote Inclusion, Prevent Expulsion (PIPE). With this brand the hope is to present a simple slogan that includes what is being worked towards. This title represents what the campaign is aiming for. It aims to prevent expulsions by promoting disciplinary practices that can be carried out in school. These practices also get educators more involved with their students and community resources. The hope is that these policy changes will include various parties in the development process of behavioral plans. This would ensure all perspectives are being heard, communication can be improved across the board, and there is more support to rely on for help disciplining difficult or struggling students.

#### **Opinions Across the State**

As part of the campaign strategy, the campaign has identified relevant groups and organizations that are classified as having varying levels of support or opposition to the advocacy campaign. The Positional Map can be seen in Appendix D.

#### **Persuasive Arguments for Support**

The two main potential supporters found in the middle of the positional map (see Appendix D) are the Tennessee Justice Center and Family and Children's Service. The Tennessee Justice Center focuses on protecting and improving the laws, policies, and programs that secure dignity and opportunity for all tennesseans. The Family and Children's service offers services for children and families that do not meet requirements for traditional social services. These

organizations may be reluctant to support the campaign since they do not directly serve the target audience in the educational system. This advocacy plan is a step towards reducing unnecessary expulsions in ages where isolation is not an understood or well-received concept.

1. The first argument is that children in the grades of preschool through second grade are at a stage where social relationships are important and necessary because this is where they learn social cues and such (Blossom & Apsche, 2013). They are still growing developmentally, behaviorally and emotionally (Stegelin et al., 2020) Being able to interact through social relationships helps children learn social cues and it is vital for their overall well-being (Blossom & Apsche, 2013). Being unable to participate socially can be a cause for adjustment disorders and it determines values and behaviors (Blossom & Apsche, 2013). The use of non-exclusionary discipline can provide well-being while still providing discipline to the child.
2. The second argument is that loneliness can produce negative consequences. When experiencing forced isolation, children fail to thrive and the chance of developing internalized disorders like depression, anxiety, and more (Blossom & Apsche, 2013). These children are unable to express how loneliness has affected them and tend to develop aggressive behaviors. These behaviors are ways for them to attract attention and eliminate their feelings of loneliness (Blossom & Apsche, 2013). Grade children being expelled or suspended for days at a time can create isolating experiences which produce opportunities for these consequences. This highlights the importance of considering the effects of certain punishments. The well-being of every child should be kept in mind when disciplining them.

3. The third argument involves explaining the rates at which certain populations are disciplined in comparison to others. The amendments to this policy will hopefully reduce the rates of minority children that are suspended or expelled. In urban populations, about 40% of black boys have experienced suspension or expulsion by age nine. (Jacobsen et al., 2019). It has been shown that almost all children of color have higher rates of suspension or expulsion than their white peers (Loomis et al., 2022). Another population that deals with these practices at alarming rates are children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are three times more likely to get suspended or expelled than those without (Rausch & Skiba, 2006). Unfortunately, not all often children are punished fairly but they all receive the consequences that come with these forms of discipline.
4. The fourth argument is in regards to school boards awareness of the root causes of students misbehavior. Despite the fact that the students spend most of their time with these individuals, it is believed that the LEAs or school board may not be aware of the root causes of this child's conduct. This law would simply limit their power to send these students home for suspension, unless their behavior endangers other people. It would not affect LEAs ability to suspend these students in school. Students who disobeyed school policies and standards would still be subject to in-school suspension from school boards or LEAs. The goal of passing this bill would simply be to ensure students are staying in school, getting the most learning opportunities, and adjusting LEAs approach to view students misbehavior with an empathic lens.
5. The fifth and final argument to introduce the amendments and create this policy change is to reduce the number of children who experience the effects of exclusionary discipline. Children who face these consequences are ten times more likely to experience academic

failure or drop out (Gilliam, 2016). These effects are lasting and the amendments proposed could reduce the number of children who will have to experience them.

### **Legislative Allies and Detractors**

It is important to target a number of Tennessee legislators and try to gain their support for the lobbying campaign. Identified supporters and detractors can be found on the Positional Map of Legislators this can be seen in Appendix D.

### **Opposition**

1. There is currently quite a bit of opposition for this bill in the Tennessee House K-12 Subcommittee. Two representatives spoke out about the bill stating that school staff should retain control over and be able to impose appropriate disciplinary measures on their students because they are the ones who are constantly in contact with them, and the House should not be taking away their authority to do so (Ragan & Cepiky, 2022). They feel that removing the power from the school board or local education agencies would be a message to them that they are incapable of properly disciplining their students (Ragan & Cepiky, 2022). The bill was ultimately not approved by the House and was moved to the Senate's docket for consideration.
2. It is possible that teachers will be against the proposed amendments to this bill. They may believe it would be too much work to take time away from their busy schedules to attend a training on emotional communication. So many teachers already invest a significant amount of their own time and money to make sure that their students are receiving the best knowledge, tools, and opportunities they need to succeed. Teachers may be under a great deal of stress, especially in light of the current teacher shortage and the new book ban law that Tennessee recently passed. As a result of this new regulation, teachers were

expected to spend even more of their personal time going through their books, producing a list, and then presenting it to their librarian or board for approval. Additionally, a lot of the content that may have previously been used for classes is being eliminated. Therefore, it is very possible that the teachers will find having to commit to yet another activity frustrating.

3. The school board and LEAs could be another opposition. They may not want to invest the extra time and effort necessary to speak with a mental health professional about disciplining a student. School board members are equally as busy as teachers, so it may be challenging for them to devote more time and effort to one child when there are so many others and the entire school that also requires their attention. They may also find it offensive to be asked to do this. Despite the fact that research shows having this extra resource boosts confidence and retention rates, they may think that the Tennessee government does not believe they are capable of handling discipline for their students and that they need someone to assist them.

### **Plans to Form a Coalition**

There are many organizations in Tennessee that advocate for children and even ones that advocate for their education. In forming a coalition, four logical partners have been identified: the Tennessee Voices for Children, Tennessee Association for Children's Early Education (TACEE), Tennessee Family Child Care Network (TFCCN), and Nashville Area Association for Education of Young Children (NAAEYC). The major goal of Tennessee Voices for Children is to provide voice, hope, and empowerment for children, youth, and their families' emotional and behavioral wellbeing. Similar services are also provided by TACEE, which promotes the best methods for the upbringing and education of children in Tennessee while giving its members



opportunities for professional growth. Both of these groups would play a crucial role in promoting the PIPE campaign and fighting for the adoption of this legislation on behalf of the students. The TFCCN is intended to assist current family child care providers in meeting the needs of all children in Tennessee in terms of education, development, and care. To communicate with schools, school boards, LEAs, and instructors, TFCCN would be the ideal liaison. They would aid in raising awareness and educating people about the campaign, hopefully resulting in the campaign gaining more supporters. By empowering all those who look after, teach, and work on behalf of young children via advocacy, leadership, and professional development, NASSEYC aspires to build a diverse, vibrant early childhood profession. This group would be ideal to assist in developing policy briefs and fact sheets so that they have information about all young children in Tennessee.

As for odd bedfellows, the campaign has identified The Tennessee Justice Center and Family and Children's Service to collaborate with. The Family and Children's Service will be crucial in assisting this campaign in gathering data and resources to support the need for mental health advice in schools. By helping to highlight the significance of this component and demonstrating how they can better support them, they would be a fantastic ally to win over school board members and teachers. The Tennessee Justice Center would advocate for and support the policy changes, as well as ensure that the suggested amendments are equitable and further refined from a political perspective. Additionally, this organization will be a useful source for follow-up training and workshops on more empathic ways to engage with children in a school environment.

## **Media Campaign**

### **Campaign Goal**

The goal for this campaign is to gain enough traction to reintroduce this policy back into the house, get proper support, and eventually introduce it as an official bill in the state of Tennessee. There are various people in the audience that can help fulfill the program's goals. The program would like to recruit legislators like Akbari, who support these changes, to sponsor and reintroduce the policy. Another goal would be for other legislators who do support this bill to step forward and sponsor it, as well as talk with their constituents and get them on board. Documents like the policy brief (see Appendix B) and the fact sheet (see Appendix A) will be used as resources to recruit these supporters. Social media outlets will potentially reach constituents that care about this topic (see Appendix F). The hope is that the constituents will see the vision of the policy amendments and care enough to call their legislators and apply pressure. The goal is that constituents take action by voting and getting involved in their local education meetings. Parents and educators who see and support the vision will hopefully get in contact with their local education agencies. Being able to gain support from local educators will help increase support and decrease the chances that these agencies will feel as though their power is being stripped away. This would also necessitate the involvement of government agencies such as CALEB. These local agencies can also provide pressure and funding that could get this policy into the government system and onto the governor's desk to be signed.

### **Media Avenues**

The program will use a variety of tools to spread this message to the targeted audience. Media sites like Instagram and Twitter will be created to interact with the younger generations (see Appendix F). Stories and regular posts will be uploaded to share reminders and information

about the campaign. It will provide more in-depth detail about the amendments and how this is affecting children. The program also wants to use more traditional media to make sure all bases are covered and allow information to reach people of all ages. Traditional media would include the use of flyers or an ad in the newspaper (see Appendix F). Local newspapers like the Chattanooga Times or the Chattanooga will be the targets for the release of these ads. These forms of media will contain a brief overview of the campaign, ways to contact the PIPE team, and a list of things to do to get involved.

### **Media Content**

The media content of this campaign includes a compilation of tweets via Twitter, flyers to post on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram (see Appendix F), and an email template for interested individuals to send off to their local legislator (see Appendix C). The campaign has managed to implement the social media post on Instagram and offered a link to the email script on their story (see Appendix H).

### **Implementation Steps**

1. The first step of the campaign will be to assemble the complete PIPE team by August 14th, 2022.
2. This team will create the media campaign for different social media platforms and flyers to be posted by August 21th, 2022 (see Appendix F). The campaign has implemented this step by posting the flyer on an Instagrams story (see Appendix H)
3. Each social media platform will be presented to the core advocacy members by August 22, 2022 for approval.
4. Each post will be shared on social media, and each flier will be posted in local businesses by August 23, 2022 so that the campaign can gain traction.

5. The team will also be sending the fact sheet (see Appendix A) and policy brief (see Appendix B) to local schools, businesses, city councils, and local stores by September 4th, 2022.
6. The next step would be to reach out to newspapers in the area as well as any local radio stations to gain more coverage over the issue by September 4th, 2022.
7. Core members of the PIPE team will conduct an interview with local newspapers and radio stations that agree to the proposal by September 15th, 2022.
8. The PIPE team will be reaching out to agencies like CALEB and other local agencies that can also provide support and funding that could get this policy into the government system and onto the governor's desk to be signed. All agencies will be contacted by September 22nd, 2022.
9. PIPE will also reach out to The Tennessee Justice Center who would ensure the proposed amendments are equitable and just. They would also help promote the policy changes through advocacy and legislation. Connection with this organization will be made by September 22nd, 2022, and any changes to the amendments will be completed by September 29th, 2022.
10. In the last step the PIPE team will recruit legislators like Akbari who support the proposed amendments to sponsor and reintroduce the policy. The emails (see Appendix C) will ask other legislators who do support this bill to step forward and sponsor as well as talk with their constituents and get them on board with the issue. Emails will be approved and sent out by October 2nd, 2022.

### **Advocacy Plan**

#### **Focus and Target Population**

Some of the people to work with are Torey Harris, a Democrat who introduced the first HB 2258 measure, and Senator Heidi Campbell, a Democrat who sponsored SB 0370, a Basic Education Program, are the major legislative targets. It would be great for the campaign to see more Tennessee legislators who support this legislation step up and sponsor it, as well as communicate with their constituents and persuade them to support the PIPE campaign.

Furthermore, the target demographic, parents of children in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade, must be involved in the campaign's lobbying. PIPE will involve social media posts from parents of young students and other members of the community (see Appendix F).

These flyers emphasize the research-based consequences of the disparity in suspension and expulsion rates between white and black children. The hope is that these leaflets will encourage individuals to contact their local legislator. A fact sheet (see Appendix A) and policy brief (see Appendix B) will not use jargon in order to appeal to the target audience.

### **Advocacy Strategies**

There is not much research that shows effective advocacy strategies amongst educational policies in specific. There are some strategies that work for most organizations regardless of their motives. One activity that has been shown to change decision makers' views and create change in the public eye is information campaigning (Gen & Wright 2018). These campaigns include gathering information on the issue in a fashion that is concise and provides straightforward actions needed from the community. There is a positive link between support built amongst allies and the general population with the indirect pressure for policy adoption (Gen & Wright 2018).

According to Bliss (2015), to maximize an advocacy campaign, it is important to know the cause or motivation that one is advocating for. The second strategy would be to make the message clear and easier for the target audiences to act upon. Having a clear message will allow

for easier implementation of tactics such as framing. According to Gen and Wright (2018), framing is a tool used to present information in a favorable way to please particular preferences. This would be helpful in reaching groups who are either out of touch with the campaign or do not consider it an issue necessary for action.

A third suggestion for programs working with the public is to maintain communication with these communities (Alderman & Inwood, 2018). Showing residents that policy advocates are available to connect with and help the community will eventually build rapport and break down barriers between advocates and the public. (Alderman & Inwood, 2018). These barriers include lack of communication with the public, lack of awareness or concern for the issue, as well as their inability to get involved due to lack of information as to who to contact. Maintaining communication will ensure the residents are informed and understand what steps they can take to help make a difference. This particular strategy would be beneficial to instill in excluded populations. Seeing a change in the people around them and the effort a program is putting in maintaining the communication line can work wonders in engaging these excluded groups (Alderman & Inwood, 2018).

The fourth strategy is showing inclusion of people with disabilities through regular media campaigns. Getting involved with diverse staff to create delivery of information that is accessible by all media users would be beneficial for this action plan (Balcazar, 2001). Some ways to accomplish this strategy would be to include captions and video or picture descriptions for disabled users. Other ways include larger fonts, keeping information simple, video descriptions, etc. These strategies will help spread the message to residents with disabilities.

The fifth strategy as encouraged by Balcazar's (2001) article, is to partake in the use of multiple communication channels such as newspapers, radios, phone calls, mailing, pamphlets,

and more. Other strategies that have been found effective are petitioning and persuasion (Bliss, 2015). Each of these suggestions are useful in increasing the likelihood of people learning about the campaign. It also increases the chances of all groups to hear this message since it will be broadcasted through various channels. These would be useful for the campaign because it would help motivate legislators to take action as well as garnering attention and support for this campaign. The last strategy is to motivate legislators by showing how they benefit from supporting this policy (Gen & Wright 2018). By presenting the research of how this policy is useful and include information on the constituents and their current support level, legislators can be persuaded (Gen & Wright 2018). It is the goal that seeing this level of support as well as the positive effects of the policy, pressure will be applied for them to take advantage of this newfound political opportunity.

### **Inclusion of Target Population**

In order to provide effective advocacy for this campaign, the target population must be included. The Promote Inclusion, Prevent Expulsion (PIPE) campaign will engage with the parents or legal guardian of students who are in Pre-Kindergarten to second grade. The schools and teachers that cater to these specified students would also be included in the advocacy efforts as they are being addressed in the amendment. PIPE plans to include the parents and legal guardians of the students by connecting them through social media platforms and posting flyers throughout the community. The schools and teachers would be addressed in the advocacy efforts by informing them about the potential positive outcomes that can result from the fulfillment of this amendment.

Once the beneficiaries are involved, PIPE will provide them with a fact sheet along with a policy brief (see Appendix A) to prepare them to reach out to legislators. These hand-outs

include research-based data that highlight the effects of the relationship between the disparity among the suspension/expulsion of white and black students along with potential negative outcomes. PIPE hopes to encourage community members to contact their legislative representative and share the importance of this amendment.

### **Potential Ramifications**

As much as campaign managers would like to involve beneficiaries to gain from this project, there are some considerations that must be taken into account. Positive ramifications for involving the parents of young students and other community members include direct community engagement, a sense of community, future community led campaigns, and opportunity for members to learn about research and how to protect their rights. Having direct engagement from the beneficiaries can help members feel heard and involved in issues that directly affect them. Seeing and working with other community members that share similar issues or interests can also unite the community. This can then lead to sparking interest in members wanting to participate in future campaigns. If parents see change from their efforts, they may want to learn more about the process of meeting with legislators and finding research to promote social change according to their beliefs.

There cannot be any changes that directly impact young students without the parents' consent or acknowledgment. This allows for parents to become involved in the process and be informed of the difficulties faced so they can, if not already, be a supportive adult. Having too much involvement of the beneficiaries may deter the campaign towards other issues. For example, if there is no set agenda to keep those involved with designated tasks then there may be a risk of reframing the intention of the advocacy. This campaign has to have strong



leaders who can distribute roles accordingly to ensure that all parties involved provide effective advocacy.

Another negative ramification is the extra time teachers or school staff may take to provide effective advocacy support. Teachers and other school staff may have to set time aside to connect with other mental health professionals and spend time participating in training.

This advocacy campaign could also raise community expectations to levels that are too high for the fulfillment of the amendment. Some community members may not be comfortable challenging legislative decisions. If community members do not feel prepared or confident to engage with the advocacy efforts then this can negatively impact the campaign.

Lastly, this campaign may apply peer pressure to those parents or legal guardians who have different views on student expulsion/suspension. Genuine support from the community is encouraged throughout this campaign, so if some parents are strongly influenced by other parents they may feel obligated to submit to other beliefs.

### **Potential Opposition**

As was already indicated, some representatives have already expressed opposition to this bill. Two representatives in the Tennessee House K-12 Subcommittee argued against the bill, stating that school staff should retain control over and be able to impose appropriate disciplinary measures on their students because they are the ones who are in daily contact with them, and that the House should not take away their right to do so (Ragan & Cepiky, 2022). The objective is that these amendments will persuade these representatives to reconsider their positions and demonstrate the value of and potential for further advancement of the bill. In addition there is a possibility that teachers will oppose the suggested amendments. They might believe that taking time away from their busy schedules to attend a workshop on emotional communication would

be too much effort. Proposing the workshops be held during the summer or right after school starts and providing food at the function could be one approach to aid this. Explaining the significance of the workshop could also help this opposition. The school board and LEAs could be another opposition. They may not want to invest the extra time and effort necessary to speak with a mental health professional about disciplining a student. It is hoped that if they recognize the value of doing this and the good this could do, they will agree. The fact sheet (Appendix A) and policy brief (see Appendix B) will be utilized by sending them a copy to view in order to better enlighten this group.

### **Elected Officials to Approach**

Legislators are another group that needs an educational approach to encourage participation in the lobbying effort. To make sure the efforts are successful, campaign managers communicate with lawmakers in many different ways. This includes face-to-face meetings, emails asking for their support, phone calls, and tagging them in many social media posts. The legislator's backing is critical to carrying out this lobbying strategy. Campaign managers want to solve this problem by building a strong community support system with this mix of strategies. The goal of the initiative would be to get lawmakers like Senator Akbari, who are in favor of these changes, to sponsor and resubmit the bill. Campaign managers would also like to set up meetings with Torey Harris, a Democrat who has sponsored the initial HB 2258 bill, as well as Senator Heidi Campbell, a Democrat who sponsored SB 0370, which is a basic education program.

There are also several groups in Tennessee that advocate for children and even for their education. The Tennessee Voices for Children, the Tennessee Association for Children's Early Education (TACEE), the Tennessee Family Child Care Network (TFCCN), and the Nashville

Area Association for the Education of Young Children (NAAEYC) would be good partners in building a coalition with some of these groups. These groups would be helpful towards approaching elected officials by offering resources like data and access to more communities. The data these organizations have will help inform and support the policy changes. It will also provide the legislators with an understanding of how current policy is impacting children in grade school. The access to communities will allow for greater support that can be recognized by legislators. Having direct access to the public through recognized and trusted organizations will increase the following of this policy. Rallying support from outsiders and including this in the reports made to legislators will hopefully sway them into action. When legislators see that there is more gain in supporting a policy rather than rejecting it, they are more likely to act in favor of said policy.

### **Key Talking Points**

The Tennessee General Assembly advises that correspondence with legislators be targeted, brief, and planned out in advance. To ensure effective communication, the PIPE team has prepared five talking points to use while speaking with legislators. The talking points outline the issue, the effects of existing disciplinary actions, goals of the bill, success from another state, and amendments related to mental health and emotional competence.

The first talking point will be in regards to the problem of the existing disciplinary measures being used by Tennessee schools for grades pre-kindergarten to second grade. The PIPE campaign will raise awareness of the fact that thousands of young Tennessee students are suspended and expelled every year. According to statistics released by the Department of Education, in 2019, students in kindergarten through second grade, nearly 3,800 students, were suspended from school without services (2019). Before the age of nine, one out of every ten

urban-born children had an expulsion or suspension on their academic records, with black boys accounting for 40% of these children (Jacobsen et al., 2019). By the time they are nine years old, most US children are still learning to read, but schools send them home and deny them access to academic opportunities for multiple days at a time. Additionally, children with disabilities are three times more likely to get suspended or expelled than those without disabilities (Rausch & Skiba, 2006). Students at this age are far too young to be suspended out of school without services and still be expected to succeed through their academic lives.

The second talking point will discuss the negative consequences for these students if things do not change. Young students who are expelled or suspended are ten times more likely to drop out of school and experience academic failure and are at a higher rate to experience incarceration (Gilliam, 2016). It is crucial to their overall wellness and developing minds that these young students remain in school during these developmental years. These children, aged four to eight, are still developing physically, behaviorally, and emotionally (Stegelin et al., 2020). It is essential for children's general wellbeing and the development of their social skills that they can interact through social relationships (“No Isolation”). The use of non-exclusionary discipline can provide well-being while still providing discipline to the child. Their parents are also impacted because they must leave work to address the situation. Due to all of these factors, there may be a divide in the child's relationship with their parents and their relationship with their school.

The third talking point will highlight the objectives of the bill and why it is crucial that it be passed. The main objectives of SB 2173/HB 2258 are to increase students' chances of academic success while keeping them in school and engaged in their studies. The goal is not to restrict Tennessee school boards of authority, but to provide students with the chance to complete

their education in school with teachers who can help them succeed. Keeping students in school increases their chances of learning the skills they need to succeed, finish their grade, and ultimately graduate. When students are sent home for out-of-school suspension, there is no telling what kind of setting they will return to. Some students might not have family members available to help them in continuing their education, turning their suspension into a brief vacation rather than a punishment. They may also live in a less than ideal home environment where they lack access to food and adequate supervision. Students who remain in school have access to teachers who can assist them, food to eat, and suitable supervision. Additionally, it will increase their chances of academic success by enabling them to form strong relationships with their teachers and expose them to more learning opportunities.

The fourth talking point will examine the expected success of SB 2173/HB 2258 in relation to other states that have passed similar legislation. In 2016, New Jersey abolished out-of-school suspensions for students in pre-kindergarten through second grade, except for their zero tolerance for gun violence and sexual assault (S2081, 2016). Texas banned out-of-school suspensions for all students up to second grade in 2017, except for behavior involving weapon possession, specific violent behaviors, and drug or alcohol possession (HB674, 2017). Some Texas schools even provided educators with training on the effects of trauma and toxic stress on students and classroom management (Ewing et al., 2018). A separate school put Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) into practice in 70 schools, with plans to expand it to another 70 during the 2017–2018 academic year (Ewing et al., 2018). The District of Columbia passed legislation in 2019 to limit the use of exclusionary disciplinary action against young students ("K-12 Student Discipline," 2019).

The fifth and final talking point will be information about the PIPE campaigns amendments. The first amendment is prior to suspension and expulsion, PIPE recommends consultation. Before suspending or expelling, the disciplinary panel should consult with a mental health professional who can provide guidance and insight into the appropriate course of action for that particular student. This would be accomplished by adopting a holistic approach and examining the student's behavior as well as their academics, family, and social lives to decide the best course of action. The second is enhancing teachers' knowledge of emotional communication and enabling them to spot warning signs in a child. This would be accomplished through a workshop that could inform teachers on how to spot these warning signs as well as improve their knowledge and ability to interact with their students. Sometimes what appears to be disruptive conduct could be a child coping with trauma or seeking support without having the language to do so. Third, after the training, teachers will be provided with the opportunity to continue working with mental health specialists for emotional support and guidance on how to implement the proper disciplinary measures. Colorado was able to successfully integrate mental health professions into their schools and local community by setting up a network of early childhood mental health consultants stationed in each community as a resource for teachers, parents, and children (Steglin, 2018).

### **Progress Monitoring Plan**

The Tennessee House rejected this bill in March, sending it to the Tennessee Senate's docket and awaiting their decision. It is still currently on the floor awaiting Senate's approval. To ensure that each beneficiary is aware of the status of this bill, the PIPE team is committed to monitoring it at every level. The shares, likes, and comments made on social media campaign posts will be tracked by PIPE. This will enable PIPE to pinpoint both places with support and

those without it, and where additional campaigning may be necessary. The PIPE team will also monitor the legislation by routinely visiting the website for the Tennessee General Assembly. The bill was added to the Senate docket on March 15, 2022, for consideration and approval. The team intends to correspond through email with members of the Senate urging them to reopen the bill with the PIPE campaigns amendments, and have supporters submit pre-written emails (see Appendix C) as well. Additionally, PIPE will make an effort to speak with legislators by video conference and with the support of the policy brief (see Appendix B). All of these steps will be done until the bill is eventually put into effect. In the event that the bill is once more rejected, the PIPE team will reassess the efforts, make the necessary adjustments, and then proceed with the implementation process from the beginning.

### **Conclusion**

Promote Inclusion, Prevent Expulsion (PIPE) is a coalition that was formed to advocate for effective and fair disciplinary actions for students in pre-kindergarten through second grade. By the time they are nine years old, most US children are still learning to read, and yet schools send students home and deny them access to academic opportunities for multiple days at a time. Children who face these consequences are ten times more likely to experience academic failure or drop out (Gilliam, 2016). High suspension rates also lead to higher rates of involvement with the juvenile justice system with 52% of African American dropouts being incarcerated as young adults (CALEB, n.d.) This campaign's objective was to pass SB2173/HB2258 with the addition of the PIPE amendments to increase its effectiveness, which would result in helping to lower these rates and to establish a society that is more stable and harmonious.

With the support of several community groups the PIPE team hopes to be able to create change within these children's school life so that they are best equipped for a successful future.

Children should not be suspended or expelled from school at this young age due to the negative impact it can have on their emotional health and educational opportunities. This policy will also address the discriminatory treatment of minority children who experience suspensions at a higher rate than their white peers (Jacobsen et al., 2019).



## References

- Alderman, D. H., & Inwood, J. F. (2018). The Need for Public Intellectuals in the Trump Era and Beyond: Strategies for Communication, Engagement, and Advocacy. *The Professional Geographer*, 71(1), 145–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2018.1452617>
- Bacher-Hicks, A. (2020, September 24). *Long-Term Impacts of School Suspension on Adult Crime*. Strategic Data Project. <https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/blog/long-term-impacts-school-suspension-adult-crime#:~:text=%E2%80%9CSchools%20that%20suspend%20more%20students,and%20adult%20criminal%20justice%20systems>
- Balcazar, F. (2001). Strategies for reaching out to minority individuals with disabilities. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e321812004-004>
- Bliss, D. L. (2015). Using the Social Work Advocacy Practice Model to Find Our Voices in Service of Advocacy. *Human Service Organizations Management, Leadership & Governance*, 39(1), 57–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2014.978060>
- Blossom, P., & Apsche, J. (2013). Effects of Loneliness on Human Development. *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy*, 7(4), 28-29. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100963>
- Candice McQueen. (2019). *State of Tennessee Annual Statistical Report*. Department of Education. [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/asr/asr\\_1718.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/asr/asr_1718.pdf)
- Ewing, D., Clark, P., Rubin, S., Moreno, J. J., & Saxton, J. (2018). Keeping Kids in Class: Pre-K Through 2nd Grade Suspensions in Texas and a Better Way Forward. *Texans Care for Children*, 40. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d34462cd94b84dc567ed/t/5b1ea6c270a6ad846fb7cbc9/1528735440357/keeping-kids-in-schools.pdf>

- Gen, S., & Wright, A. C. (2018). Strategies of Policy Advocacy Organizations and their Theoretical Affinities: Evidence from Q-Methodology. *Policy Studies Journal*, 46(2), 298–326. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12167>
- Gilliam, W. S. (2016, September). Early Childhood Expulsions and Suspensions Undermine our Nation’s Most Promising Agent of Opportunity and Social Justice. *The Moriah Group*. Moriah Group. <https://themoriahgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/early-childhood-expulsions-and-suspensions.pdf>
- Gonzales, J. (2017, March 4). *Backlash over pre-K and Kindergarten Suspensions prompts New Bill*. The Tennessean. Retrieved October 4, 2022, from <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2017/03/03/backlash-over-pre-k-and-kindergarten-suspensions-prompts-new-bill/98635192/>
- Harris, T. C. (2022, March 15). *K-12 Subcommittee* [Video]. Tennessee General Assembly. [https://tnga.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=610&clip\\_id=26594](https://tnga.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=610&clip_id=26594)
- Haston, K. (2022, March 15). *K-12 Subcommittee* [Video]. Tennessee General Assembly. [https://tnga.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=610&clip\\_id=26594](https://tnga.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=610&clip_id=26594)
- HB674, 85th Legislature, 2017 Reg. Sess. (TX. 2017). <https://legiscan.com/TX/text/HB674/id/1624828>
- Jacobsen, W. C., Pace, G. T., & Ramirez, N. G. (2019). Punishment and Inequality at an Early Age: Exclusionary Discipline in Elementary School. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 973–998. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1093/sf/soy072>
- K-12 Student Discipline Policy Guidance*. (2019, July 26). District of Columbia Public Schools. <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/SY-2019-20-Discipline-Policy-Guidance-July-2019.pdf>

- Loomis, A. M., Freed, S., & Coffey, R. (2022). Inhibitory Control, Student–Teacher Relationships, and Expulsion Risk in Preschools: An Indirect Effects Path Analysis. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01287-x>
- Malik, R. (2017, November 6). *New Data Reveal 250 Preschoolers are Suspended or Expelled Every Day*. American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/new-data-reveal-250-preschoolers-suspended-expelled-every-day/#:~:text=%20This%20is%20the%20first%20nationally,preschooler%20being%20suspended%20or%20expelled>
- No Isolation. (n.d.). *How does social isolation affect a child's mental health and...* No Isolation. Retrieved October 22, 2022, from <https://www.noisolation.com/research/how-does-social-isolation-affect-a-childs-mental-health-and-development>
- Ragan, J., & Cepiky, S. (2022, March 15). *K-12 Subcommittee* [Video]. Tennessee General Assembly. [https://tnga.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=610&clip\\_id=26594](https://tnga.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=610&clip_id=26594)
- Rafa, A. (2018, January). *What is the issue and why does it matter?* . ECS. Retrieved October 5, 2022, from [https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Suspension\\_and\\_Expulsion.pdf](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Suspension_and_Expulsion.pdf)
- Rausch, K. M., & Skiba, R. (2006). Discipline, Disability, and Race: Disproportionality in Indiana School. Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, 4(10). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495751.pdf>
- Stegelin, D. A. (2018, December). *Preschool Suspension and Expulsion: Defining the Issues*. Institute for Child Success. <https://www.instituteforchildsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ICS-2018-PreschoolSuspensionBrief-WEB.pdf>
- Stegelin, D. D., Leggett, C., Ricketts, D., Bryant, M., Holzner, A., & Peterson, C. (2020). *Trauma-informed preschool education in public school classrooms: Responding to*

suspension, expulsion, and mental health issues of young children. *The Journal of At-Risk Issues*, 23(2), 9–24.

S2081, 217th Legislature, 2016 Reg. Sess. (NJ. 2016).

[https://pub.njleg.gov/bills/2016/S2500/2081\\_I1.PDF](https://pub.njleg.gov/bills/2016/S2500/2081_I1.PDF)

Tanious, S. M. (2022). Schoolhouse Property. *Yale Law Journal*, 131(5), 1641–1718.

Tennessee Department of Education. (2020). *2020 Report Card Data*. Tennessee State Government. <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/data-downloads.html>

US Census Bureau. (2018). *School enrollment in Tennessee (state)*. The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States - Statistical Atlas. Retrieved September 28, 2022, from <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Tennessee/School-Enrollment#overview>

Zulauf-McCurdy, C. A., & Zinsser, K. M. (2020). How teachers' perceptions of the parent–teacher relationship affect children's risk for early childhood expulsion. *Psychology in the Schools*, 58(1), 69–88. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22440>

## Appendix A

### Fact Sheet



## RATES OF DISCIPLINE IN GRADE SCHOOL

1. By the age of 9, 28% of black children and 7% of white children report having been suspended or expelled, a 4x higher rate than that of white children.<sup>5</sup>
2. By age 9, 40% of black boys and 15% of black girls are suspended or expelled in urban areas.<sup>3</sup>
3. Students with disabilities are three times more likely to get suspended or expelled.<sup>6</sup>

## CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY DISCIPLINE

1. Children who face these consequences are 10 times more likely to experience academic failure or drop out
2. Direct association between early suspension and expulsions and imprisonment rates later in life.<sup>3</sup>
3. Interrupts routine and causes child to fall behind
4. Suspension or expulsion are associated with<sup>2</sup>increased aggressive behavior in elementary school.

## SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

1. Family and Children's Service TN
2. Tennessee Voices for Children
3. CALEB - Chattanooga

“We know that young children thrive in the context of stable, supportive relationships with adults who love, teach, and care for them. Expulsions and suspensions in early childhood education both threaten the development of these positive relationships and are a result of the lack of positive relationships between educators, families and children.”

- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR THE EDUCATION OF  
YOUNG CHILDREN

## Resources

1. Gilliam, W. S. (2016, September). Early childhood expulsions and suspensions undermine our nation's most promising agent of opportunity and social justice. *The Moriah Group*. Moriah Group. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://themoriahgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/early-childhood-expulsions-and-suspensions.pdf>
2. Giordano, K., Interra, V. L., Stillo, G. C., Mims, A. T., & Block-Lerner, J. (2021). Associations Between Child and Administrator Race and Suspension and Expulsion Rates in Community Childcare Programs. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49(1), 125-133. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1007/s10643-020-01049-1>
3. Jacobsen, W. C., Pace, G. T., & Ramirez, N. G. (2019). Punishment and Inequality at an Early Age: Exclusionary Discipline in Elementary School. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 973-998. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1093/sf/soy072>
4. Malik, R. (2017, November 6). *New Data Reveal 250 Preschoolers are Suspended or Expelled Every Day*. American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/new-data-reveal-250-preschoolers-suspended-expelled-every-day/#:~:text=%20This%20is%20the%20first%20nationally,preschooler%20being%20suspended%20or%20expelled>
5. Owens, J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2020). Unpacking the Drivers of Racial Disparities in School Suspension and Expulsion. *Social Forces*, 98(4), 1548-1577. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1093/sf/soz095>
6. Rausch, K. M., & Skiba, R. (2006). Discipline, Disability, and Race: Disproportionality in Indiana School. Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, 4(10). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495751.pdf>
7. Tennessee Department of Education. (2022). *Data Downloads & Requests*. Tennessee State Government - TN.gov. Retrieved September 28, 2022, from <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/data-downloads.html>

## Appendix B

### Policy Brief

#### Policy Brief

## Promote Inclusion, Prevent Expulsion in TN Schools (Pre-k- 2<sup>nd</sup> grade)

Written by Sarah Evans, Southern Adventist University

### Problem

Young Tennessee students in grades pre-kindergarten to second grade are being suspended and expelled from school for innocuous behaviours and sent home to miss out on important educational opportunities when they could be disciplined with in school suspension instead. Before the age of nine one in ten TN urban-born children had an expulsion or suspension on their academic records, and 40% of these children are black boys.<sup>1</sup> By the time they are nine years old, most US children are still learning to read, but schools send them home and deny them access to academic opportunities for multiple days at a time. Children who face these consequences are ten times more likely to experience academic failure or drop out.<sup>2</sup> This problem also affects parents who must take time off work to pick up their children from school and then remain home with them or hire a babysitter to watch them while they are suspended or expelled, adding to any financial difficulties they may already be experiencing. Additionally, a 2020 Report Card by the Tennessee Department of Education showed that for every 100 white students only four are suspended but for every 100 black students 16 are suspended.<sup>3</sup> This shows the inequality and racial disparity among race in school discipline. Any given student with more than three suspension raises their likelihood of dropping out by 31% and for any student that has less than three suspensions only have a 6% likelihood of dropping out.<sup>4</sup> Suspensions lead to higher rates of involvement with the juvenile justice system with 52% of African American dropouts being incarcerated as young adults.<sup>5</sup> There is a direct association between early suspension and expulsions and imprisonment rates later in life.<sup>6</sup> It is crucial that schools take all appropriate measures to reduce these rates and, as a result, build a more stable and harmonious society.

### Key messages and recommendations

- Problem: Young students are being suspended and expelled at a disproportionately high rate
- Recommendation 1: Consultation Before Expulsion and Suspension
- Recommendation 2: Education on Emotional Communication
- Recommendation 3: Ongoing Communication with Mental Health Professionals

<sup>1</sup>Jacobsen, W. C., Pace, G. T., & Ramirez, N. G. (2019). Punishment and Inequality at an Early Age: Exclusionary Discipline in Elementary School. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 973–998. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1093/sf/soy072>

<sup>2</sup> Gilliam, W. S. (2016, September). Early Childhood Expulsions and Suspensions Undermine our Nation's Most Promising Agent of Opportunity and Social Justice. The Moriah Group. Moriah Group. <https://themoriahgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/early-childhood-expulsions-and-suspensions.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Tennessee Department of Education. (2020). 2020 Report Card Data. Tennessee State Government. <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/data-downloads.html>

<sup>4</sup> CALEB - Chattanooga in Action for Love, Equality and Benevolence. (n.d.). Education Platform. CALEB. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from <http://www.calebcha.org/education.html>

<sup>5</sup> CALEB - Chattanooga in Action for Love, Equality and Benevolence. (n.d.). Education Platform. CALEB. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from <http://www.calebcha.org/education.html>

<sup>6</sup> Jacobsen, W. C., Pace, G. T., & Ramirez, N. G. (2019). Punishment and Inequality at an Early Age: Exclusionary Discipline in Elementary School. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 973–998. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1093/sf/soy072>



### Current Policy Situation

The TN K-12 Subcommittee of the Education Administration rejected this bill on March 15, 2022. They feared it would deprive schools of their ability to discipline their students. The goal is not to take away the school's right to discipline its students; instead, the goal is to make sure that these young students are attending class and acquiring the skills they need to graduate on time with their peers, and that minor misbehavior shouldn't stand in their way. Additionally, PIPE believes that LEAs might not have a full understanding of the underlying factors influencing the child's behavior, therefore the policy should mandate a workshop and provide these LEAs with materials to better understand this. Simply keeping students in school, maximizing their learning opportunities, and modifying LEA strategies to see students' misbehavior through an empathic lens would be the objectives of passing this bill.

### Recommendations

The PIPE campaign has a few recommendations for this bill that they feel will greatly help it succeed as well as support teachers and school personnel who are doing their best to take care of the students.

#### Recommendation 1: Consultation Before Expulsion and Suspension

PIPE recommends that before suspending or expelling a student LEAs consult with a mental health specialist (such as a psychologist or behavioural therapist). This will provide LEAs the freedom to discuss what they think is best for the young student with a mental health professional and receive guidance on the best course of action for that child. Collaboration with professionals, families, and school systems is required to support students who exhibit challenging conduct, which many teachers believe will benefit them.<sup>7</sup>

#### Recommendation 2: Education on Emotional Communication

Another recommendation is holding a workshop for teachers on emotional communication as well as how to recognize red flags that a child's home situation might not be ideal or if there are signs of trauma. This is so that teachers can better understand why their students are misbehaving, how to better encourage their students, and help their students succeed in school. The Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) notes that signs that preschool-aged children may be experiencing child traumatic stress are behaviors such as crying and screaming a lot, and that survivors of child trauma are more likely to have poorer grades and experience more suspensions and expulsions.<sup>8</sup> This course will enable instructors to recognize these symptoms of trauma in children and assist them rather than penalizing them.

#### Recommendation 3: Ongoing Communication with Mental Health Professionals

After completing the workshop teachers would also have the opportunity to work in conjunction with mental health professionals on how to proceed with certain students who may be struggling in various ways. Implementing mental health professionals has proven to lower suspension and expulsion rates.<sup>9</sup> This was done successfully in Colorado by establishing a network of Early Childhood Mental Health consultants who were stationed in each community as a resource for teachers, parents, and children.<sup>10</sup>

If these recommendations are put into action, teachers and LEAs in schools will have a better grasp of what their students need and how to support them. This will give students additional opportunities to continue their education while they are still in school, preventing them from falling behind and strengthening their relationship with their teachers and their school.

<sup>7</sup> O'Grady, C., & Ostrosky, M. M. (2021, November 24). Suspension and Expulsion: Early Educators' Perspectives. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01285-z>

<sup>8</sup> Hood, J. (2020, December 3). *Early Education Suspensions Ignore the Science of Traumatic Stress*. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/early-education-suspensions-ignore-science-traumatic-stress/?fbclid=IwAR3apXDmSjW6sk5NcNMxOLuaUvoZUEAMBogIPU7AkFT4A5r8NQYgXBZJxA8>

<sup>9</sup> O'Grady, C., & Ostrosky, M. M. (2021, November 24). Suspension and Expulsion: Early Educators' Perspectives. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01285-z>

<sup>10</sup> O'Grady, C., & Ostrosky, M. M. (2021, November 24). Suspension and Expulsion: Early Educators' Perspectives. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01285-z>

## Appendix C

### Sample Email

Hello, my name is [Name] from [City, State] and I am a voting constituent of your district. I am writing to you to express my support for HB2258 Rep. Torrey Harris and Rep. Raumesh Akbari – the LEA disciplinary bill. This legislation will allow students in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade to be disciplined in school and increase their opportunity to learn and grow academically as well as increase their likelihood of academic success. This bill is critical for the future of our community and is personally beneficial to my family and I as we have young children in school.

We understand that HB2258 by Rep. Torey Harris and Rep. Raumesh Akbari along with the group PIPE, seeks to redefine the process of disciplinary action for our students in pre-kindergarten through second grade. If this bill is not passed with the following improvements, then that would be detrimental for the future of our community due to the fact that one in ten urban-born children already have an expulsion or suspension on their scholastic records.

Keeping students in the classrooms and giving them access to the necessary resources positively helps our community. As a reminder, having a strong supportive system for our children will result in a better future for the community. Similar legislation has been implemented in Texas, the District of Columbia, and New Jersey, and those states have all experienced advances in their educational systems over time.

Please consider including the amendments created by the Promote Inclusion, Prevent Expulsion Campaign that will also include the addition of mental health professionals in the school when it comes to discipline. Thank you for your time.

Please SUPPORT HB2258 by voting YES!



## Appendix D

### Positional Map for Legislators

Opposition	Proponents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kirk Haston- Representative in District 72, Republican, Chair in k-12 subcommittee but voted against SB 2173/HB 2258</li> <li>● Scott Cepicky- Representative of District 64, Republican, Chair in k-12 subcommittee but voted against SB 2173/HB 2258</li> <li>● Ferrel Haile- Senator for District 18, Republican, Committee member in Education.</li> <li>● John D. Ragen- Representative of District 33, Republican, Chair in k-12 subcommittee but voted against SB 2173/HB 2258</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Torey Harris- Representative for District 90, Democrat, Sponsored initial HB 2258</li> <li>● Raumes Akbari, Senator for District 29, Democrat, Sponsored SB 2173</li> <li>● Heidi Campbell, Senator for District 20, Democrat, Sponsored SB 0370 which is a Basic Education Program</li> <li>● Yusef Hakeem, Representative of District 28, Democrat, is a member of the Education Administration Committee and Higher Education Subcommittee</li> </ul> <p>Committee of Education, Subcommittee k-12</p>

### Appendix E

#### Positional Map for Non-Legislators

<b>Detractors</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Supporters</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Brian Kelsey, Senator of District 31, Republican-proposed banning of critical race theory (CRT).</li><li>● John Ragan, Representative of District 69, Republican- Filed an amendment that prohibits schools teaching one race or sex is superior (details on CRT)</li><li>● Marsha Blackburn-Senator, Republican, believes that America is not a racial driven country, supports banning CRT.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The Tennessee Justice Center</li><li>● Family and Children's Service</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Tennessee Voices for Children</li><li>● Tennessee Family Child Care Network</li><li>● Tennessee Association for Children's Early Education</li><li>● Nashville Area Association for Education of Young Children</li></ul>

## Appendix F

### Media Campaign Posts

# PROMOTE INCLUSION NOT EXPULSION!

## HB2258

### HB2258

Help us pass HB2258! We propose that LEA's should implement a restorative disciplinary approach for children in PreK-2nd grade.

### FEWER SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS

Reducing suspensions and expulsions:

- Decreases the chance that a student will be incarcerated as an adult, helping address the [school-to-prison pipeline](#).
- Reduces the chance a student will drop out.
- Helps students remain in the learning community and provides them with new learning opportunities.
- Increases student test scores.
- Reduces familial strain.



### IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES

Restorative justice in our schools:

- Addresses the underlying cause of negative behaviors, leading to long-term behavior improvement.
- Fosters a strong community and a positive learning environment.
- Reduces suspensions and expulsions anywhere from 15-50%.



## Save Tax Dollars!

Intervention is best implemented at a young age. Addressing this issue now can lead to less tax dollars spent on incarcerated adults in the future.

## How You Can Help

Contact your legislator by phone or email letting them know you care for our students! Feel free to use the script attached.





**KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL**

@SAMI

Schools are children's second home. Let's advocate for our kids and give them the resources they need to STAY in school  
#Inclusion #Diversity



**KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL**

@SAMI

Kids deserve to have a fair chance at be educated and provided with the resources they need to succeed.  
#Inclusion #Diversity

## Appendix G

### Call to Action Script

We were all a little kid once, whether we were the quiet kid or the jokester in class, we all deserved to be educated and given a fair chance to succeed. In the state of Tennessee, there are hundreds of young children between the ages of 3-7 getting suspended from school. Children who are suspended or expelled are ten times more likely to experience academic failure than their peers. Does this seem like a fair chance?

On March 15, 2022, HB 2258 failed in the K-12 Subcommittee of the Education Administration due to the strong belief that the government should not intervene in how schools dictate punishing a child. This means that schools have the power to make their own decisions on how a student is punished according to their guidelines.

My name is Ilsia Bonilla and I am a School Social Worker who advocates for children by addressing the barriers they face that may interfere with their academic success. Throughout the years, I have met with children of all ages who have a desire to learn but are challenged with a system that is not prepared to fulfill their needs. Being that children are at school 5 days a week; we can almost consider it to be their second home. Creating connections, learning new skills, and building self-esteem are all things that are developed in school. Children thrive in routine and if they are removed, it may disrupt their development.

The future of our community lies in the classrooms. Here is what we propose along with passing this bill:

- Before suspension/expulsion is considered, local education agencies must consult with a mental health specialist.
- Educate teachers on how adverse childhood experiences translate in the classroom.
- Teachers will have mental health professionals available to them to help address children who are struggling in class.

Will you join me in passing HB2258? Please contact your local legislator and let them know that we care for our children's futures. Ask them to support our children by passing this bill. Let's keep our kids in school and give them the resources they need to become a self-sufficient adult in the community.

# Appendix H

## Implemented Material

Your story 39s

### PROMOTE INCLUSION NOT EXPULSION! HB2258

**HB2258** Help us pass HB2258! We propose that LEA's should implement a restorative disciplinary approach for children in PreK-2nd grade.

#### FEWER SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS

Reducing suspensions and expulsions:

- Decreases the chance that a student will be incarcerated as an adult, helping address the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Reduces the chance a student will drop out.
- Helps students remain in the learning community and provides them with new learning opportunities.
- Increases student test scores.
- Reduces familial strain.

#### IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES

Restorative justice in our schools:

- Addresses the underlying cause of negative behaviors, leading to long-term behavior improvement.
- Fosters a strong community and a positive learning environment.
- Reduces suspensions and expulsions anywhere from 15-50%.

### Save Tax Dollars!

Intervention is best implemented at a young age. Addressing this issue now can lead to less tax dollars spent on incarcerated adults in the future.

### How You Can Help

Contact your legislator by phone or email letting them know you care for our students! Feel free to use the script attached.

Slide up for access to scripts!

Create Highlight More