

## **DISCIPLINE REVIEW – DISCUSSION TOPICS**

The list below represents a compilation of various issues brought to the attention of the board. The issues are listed “chronologically,” roughly paralleling the sequence of our discipline process. Every effort has been made to present the list factually, without assigning any value judgment. To the extent specific examples are provided, they are merely provided to clarify the stated concern.

### **Issue: Terminology**

Confusion over the terminology used in our disciplinary process contributes to public misunderstanding of our process. Expulsion in FCPS, for example, does not equal “no services” as it traditionally means in other school systems.

### **Issue: Absenteeism**

Studies show that absenteeism is a potential indicator of disciplinary problems at the earliest grade levels. Reducing absenteeism may reduce future discipline problems. Understanding absenteeism as a leading indicator could benefit FCPS’s ability to predict and impact possible disciplinary issues in the future.

### **Issue: Parent Notification**

Concerns raised by parents that they are not immediately informed when their child has been accused of a serious violation of the SR&R that could lead to suspension, expulsion, or even criminal charges.

### **Issue: Support on Suspension**

Suspended students risk losing academic ground and becoming involved in more serious disciplinary infractions while on unsupervised suspension. Some suspensions, especially those with recommendations for expulsion, can last for weeks or even months.

### **Issue: Hearing Process**

Concerns expressed that the Hearing Process is overly adversarial and/or confrontational. Except for during appeal hearings before three-member school board panels, no objective evidence – such as transcripts or recordings – exist to prove or disprove this claim.

### **Issue: Discipline Infractions by Students with Active IEPs**

The Fairfax County PTA has raised concerns with the Board regarding disciplinary infractions by students with active IEPs. FCPTA asserts that in cases involving students with active IEPs, the MDR rarely determines that the disciplinary infraction was related to the student’s disability.

### **Issue: “Zero Tolerance”**

Students facing their first serious disciplinary infraction have been removed from their base school as a consequence.

**Issue: Inconsistent application of disciplinary consequences**

High schools have each developed their own discipline matrices and they are not always consistent. In addition, anecdotal experience with student discipline cases by board members suggests some inconsistency in disciplinary consequences for substantially similar students who commit substantially similar disciplinary infractions.

**Issue: Reassignment**

Effectiveness of use of reassignment as a discipline practice is unclear. Challenges with transportation for some reassigned students exist, potentially contributing to high school drop out rates. Reassignment does not always accommodate special academic (especially advanced academic) needs of students or other special circumstances that could have life-altering consequences.

**Issue: Return to Base School**

Although no formal school board policy exists mandating it, data shows that once students are reassigned they are rarely allowed to return to their base school even when the principal would not object to a student's return.

**Issue: Permanent Probationary Status**

Examples have been brought forth of students being on disciplinary probation for substantial portion of academic career after a single discipline infraction.

**Issue: Practice vs. Policy vs. Legislation and Code**

There is a general lack of clarity regarding which discipline practices are simply practices that have developed over time versus standards that are required as result of formally adopted School Board Policy or the Virginia Code. Routine review of new policies post-implementation might reveal unintended consequences, such as suspended (not expelled) students being reassigned to alternative high schools without a right to appeal. School Board could consider advocating for changes to so-called "Zero Tolerance" legislation in order to gain greater flexibility in managing the disciplinary issues in our school system.