



School Discipline Guidance: Debunking Myths

In January 2014, the Obama administration Department of Education (ED) announced a joint effort with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to address inequities in school discipline by releasing a [school discipline guidance package](#). When the Trump administration came into office, it quickly launched an attack on the discipline guidance. Initially, Secretary DeVos claimed teachers felt unsafe because of the guidance and had closed door meetings with carefully selected teachers, one reporting she was body slammed by a first grader. Then, in the weeks following the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the Trump administration and Congressional Republicans launched a public relations campaign to build support/justify the potential rescission, linking the guidance to the school shooting.

Here are the facts about the discipline guidance:

- **The 2014 guidance addresses discipline disparities and inequitable treatment of students of color.**
 - Under Titles IV and VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, schools have legal obligations to administer student discipline without discriminating on the base of race, color, or national origin.
 - The guidance does not establish a new set of requirements but clarifies that schools must comply with the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. It provides the tools and resources schools need to meet their legal obligations.
 - The [Dear Colleague letter](#) encouraged, but did not require, schools to review policies and practices related to discipline to ensure they were administered fairly and not in a discriminatory manner.
- **The 2014 guidance does not require a reduction in suspension and expulsion if no inequities are present.**
 - The guidance package includes materials to support an overall reduction in suspension and expulsion, but does not require practices to be stopped.
 - Also included were best practices if schools seek to reduce suspensions and expulsions, including an [extensive directory](#) of federal climate and discipline resources.
- **Decades of evidence show high rates of suspensions and expulsions lead to an unwelcoming and unsafe school climate.**
 - Another resource offered in the 2014 discipline guidance package was a list of [guiding principles](#) and action steps to improve school climate.
 - Just recently, a [study](#) was released that found Chicago Public Schools found along with a drop in suspensions, schools undergoing discipline reforms had increases in test scores, increases in attendance, and students did not feel less safe.
- **Broward County already had successful, evidence-based discipline reforms in place.**
 - Broward County changed its discipline policies in 2013 to move away from a zero-tolerance approach for minor infractions.
 - Instead, the county launched the Preventing Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring, Interventions, Supports, and Education ([PROMISE](#)) that successfully decreased arrests by [two-thirds](#) for minor infractions and found that 90% of students receiving counseling through the program did not repeat the behavior.
 - The PROMISE program [does not prohibit](#) referral to law enforcement and still utilizes suspension and expulsion for serious infractions.