



A MODEL CODE on Education and Dignity

CHAPTER 3: DIGNITY

3.1 Key Elements of School Climate and Positive Discipline

Human Rights Goal

The purpose of discipline must be to understand and address the causes of behavior, resolve conflicts, repair the harm done, restore relationships and reintegrate students into the school community.⁹³ School discipline policies shall be aimed at creating a positive school climate, supporting the social and emotional development of students, and teaching non-violence and respect for all members of the school community.⁹⁴ By viewing social development as a critical aspect of discipline, states, districts and schools shall anticipate and respond to school disciplinary matters in a manner that is consistent with students' sense of dignity and self-worth, thus creating safer schools⁹⁵ In addition, particular attention and intervention support shall be provided to vulnerable families and youth at risk of being pushed out.⁹⁶ Schools must adopt a school-wide trauma-sensitive approach that ensures that students who have experienced trauma have space to heal, and are not re-traumatized by school policies or practices.

Definitions

- 1. Discipline** – To understand and address the causes of behavior, resolve conflicts, repair the harm done, restore relationships and reintegrate students into the school community. Also, to teach, model and instruct.
- 2. Preventive and Positive Discipline** – Preventive and positive approaches to discipline create safe, supportive and positive school climates and respond to misbehavior with interventions and consequences aimed at understanding and addressing the causes of misbehavior, resolving conflicts, meeting students' needs and keeping students in school. There are a variety of school-wide models for positive discipline and this section describes key elements that any model should incorporate. Model Policies in Section 3.7 describe two models in particular that implement those key elements—School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) and Restorative Justice Practices.
- 3. Culturally Affirming Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** – The processes of developing social and emotional skills or competencies in students critical to supporting success in school and throughout life. SEL is based on the understanding that the most effective ways for students to learn is in the context of collaborative and supportive relationships with teachers, staff and their peers to make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful and to prevent and reduce disruption and conflict. SEL strategies are found to be effective in reducing behavioral problems and increasing academic achievement and should be implemented at all grade levels.⁹⁷ These approaches are considered culturally affirming when they seek to build on the students' strengths and culture, rather than applying a single view of what positive social and emotional skills look like to all students.
- 4. Exclusion** – Any removal, suspension, expulsion or involuntary transfer that removes a student from their regular classroom. Exclusion should only be used as a last resort and only for a school-based infraction (that takes place on school grounds and during the school's operating hours). More detailed definitions and guidelines for exclusion are provided in Section 3.2 Guidelines for Suspensions, Expulsions, and Removals.
- 5. Zero-tolerance** – Any school discipline policy or practice that results in an automatic disciplinary consequence such as suspension or expulsion for a student who commits a listed offense. A school discipline policy may be a zero-tolerance policy even if administrators have some discretion to modify the consequence on a case-by-case basis. Zero-tolerance policies should be eliminated.

6. **Trauma-Informed/Trauma-Sensitive** – Describes an environment (like a school) that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, and that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for survivors of trauma. Survivors have support and space to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. These schools anticipate and avoid policies and practices that are likely to re-traumatize people, and center student voice and participation in the development, delivery, and evaluation of services. Unlike trauma-specific services defined below, this is more of a universal framework that requires changes to the practices, policies, and culture of an entire school, so all staff have the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to support trauma survivors.⁹⁸
7. **Trauma-specific Services** – Clinical interventions that are designed to address trauma related symptoms and PTSD directly in individuals and groups.⁹⁹ These services may come from social workers, counselors, therapists or other service providers, whereas all school staff can use trauma-sensitive approaches in their day-to-day work with all students.
8. **Healing Centered Engagement**¹⁰⁰ – Approaches that are similar to trauma-informed care in that they recognize that people who have experienced trauma require additional support, but seek to center the healing and resilience of the person, rather than the trauma. This approach also looks to address the root causes of the trauma in a way that trauma-sensitive approaches may not. For example, many young people may be experiencing trauma due to gun violence in their neighborhood. In healing-centered engagement, while supporting the young people who are impacted by this violence, the school would also be working to address the root causes of the gun violence itself.

Recommended Language

- A. **States, districts and schools shall establish positive school climates as an essential component of supporting positive educational outcomes and preventing disciplinary problems in schools, including:**
 1. Creating a positive physical environment to foster healthy, respectful climates for learning:
 - a. Displaying positive messages and visuals that convey shared community norms and values and celebrate students' learning and accomplishments;
 - b. Keeping schools clean and healthy for all members of the school community, including ensuring that student bathrooms are kept clean and unlocked for students' use;
 - c. Designating physical spaces in the school where students can go to meet with counselors, support staff and peers, as well as to de-escalate and resolve conflicts; and
 - d. Avoiding bars on windows, gates in hallways or fences with barbed wire that create degrading or criminalized environments (see Section 3.3 Law Enforcement and Criminalization in School Environments for a full list of items to be avoided, including metal detectors, and surveillance technology).
 2. Promoting a participatory and supportive school community¹⁰¹ to build strong connections between students and staff (see also Chapter 2 on the Right to Participation):
 - a. Creating structures and practices that enable students to be active and effective participants in the learning process, to express their views and to give input into decisions that affect their education (see Section 2.2 Rights of Children and Youth to Participation);
 - b. Holding school-wide conversations through town halls, advisory classes or other mechanisms to develop and regularly discuss shared values, norms and practices for the school to build trust and develop positive relationships between students and staff;
 - c. Creating opportunities for students to express themselves through art, music, cultural celebrations, sports, free play and other activities;
 - d. Making it clear for students who they can go to for help and support; and
 - e. When crisis situations or traumatic incidents occur in the school or community, creating a time and space to discuss what happened and its impact on the school community and to identify supports for students.

3. Providing early intervention for students at risk of being pushed out of school, including students with disabilities, students with behavior issues, students with unstable family and home lives, homeless students, students who have been the target of bullying behavior and students who have a history of discipline problems. Early intervention services may include:
 - a. Ensuring that teachers and other adults listen to students needs and concerns;
 - b. Recognizing and accommodating the responsibilities that some students have with family and work obligations, including having children of their own;
 - c. Conducting surveys asking students what they need and what their concerns are and creating mechanisms to work with students to provide the necessary support;
 - d. Creating a clear process for students, parents or guardians to ask for help or counseling with a quick turnaround time to respond to crisis situations; and
 - e. Developing and supporting student leaders to provide mentoring, intervention and mediation to other students.

B. States, districts and schools shall implement equity-focused,¹⁰² culturally affirming social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies, which are at the foundation of creating a positive school environment and effectively implementing positive discipline approaches. Schools must:¹⁰³

1. Teach and reinforce the following competencies in students: self-awareness, self-management and management of feelings, social awareness, how to give and receive criticism, constructive communication skills, relationship skills and responsible decision-making;¹⁰⁴
 - a. These skills should be building off of the strengths of each student and their culture, rather than having one view of how these skills should be applied to all students.¹⁰⁵ The approach should focus on students' assets and should not assume that students have a deficit of social and emotional skills.¹⁰⁶
 - b. School staff should also model these competencies in their interactions with students and each other.
2. Adopt specific, structured SEL curricula into classrooms which last at least nine months, (i.e. lesson plans designed specifically to teach core SEL competencies, including self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, recognition for positive behavior, etc.).
3. Infuse SEL activities into regular academic curricula (i.e. introduce restorative circles as routine practice, structure lessons to enhance students' pro-social involvement, ability to work in groups, and/or relationship with parents, etc.).
4. Infuse SEL activities into extracurricular and school-wide activities (i.e. recess, school field days, assemblies, etc.).
5. Incorporate lessons that connect SEL skills to daily life outside the classroom through interactive instruction and providing frequent opportunities for student self-direction.
6. Foster respectful, collaborative and supportive relationships among students, school staff and parents and increase opportunities for healthy bonding among these groups (i.e. providing opportunities for parents to volunteer in classrooms, setting up parent training courses on using SEL techniques at home, creating a parent-teacher SEL book club¹⁰⁷).
7. Routinely evaluate the effectiveness of such practices, including staff's ability to relate to students through the programs, and adjust them as necessary.

C. States, districts and schools shall adopt evidence-based, school-wide, preventive and positive discipline policies¹⁰⁸ that are developed with the participation of students, parents or guardians, educators and other stakeholders. These policies must be aimed at understanding and addressing the root causes of behavior; resolving conflicts and repairing the harm done; restoring relationships in the school community; and reintegrating students into the school community (see Section 3.7 Model Policies on School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Restorative Justice Practices) for detailed information on

implementing two examples of models that fit these requirements. Whatever model or combination of models that is chosen, the approach must include the following elements:

1. Creating clear expectations and graduated levels of support and intervention for all students with consequences for misbehavior that are individualized, consistent, reasonable, fair, age appropriate and match the severity of the student’s behavior.¹⁰⁹
 - a. In determining interventions and consequences, schools shall take into account the range of factors described in Section 3.2 Guidelines for Suspensions, Expulsions and Removals, sub-section B on factors that can affect a student’s behavior in order to determine appropriate consequences on a case-by-case basis.
 - b. Schools should utilize non-exclusionary discipline responses and alternatives to suspension with support by qualified staff that have the necessary training to carry them out effectively, with the goal of getting to the root of the problem that led to the student’s behavior. Some examples of disciplinary responses are listed below that can be used with various approaches (for more information on strategies specific to SWPBIS or Restorative Justice Practices, see Section 3.7 Model Policies on School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Restorative Justice Practices):
 - i. Mediation and conflict resolution;
 - ii. Restorative circles, conversations and family group conferences;
 - iii. Transformative justice approaches;
 - iv. Counseling;
 - v. Tiered Support Team interventions;
 - vi. Community Service; and
 - vii. Written and verbal apologies.
2. Limiting the use of exclusion in the form of suspension or expulsion to only the most serious offenses. Exclusion shall only be used after non-exclusionary discipline alternatives have been carefully considered, tried and documented to the extent reasonable and feasible and only if, after that consideration, it is determined that exclusion from school is absolutely necessary to protect the safety of the school community (Section 3.2 Guidelines for Suspensions, Expulsions and Removals).
3. Eliminating zero-tolerance laws and policies. Federal and state legislators shall repeal zero-tolerance laws¹¹⁰ and districts and schools shall revise Discipline Codes, Codes of Conduct and discipline policies to eliminate zero-tolerance policies which mandate suspension or expulsion for one or more listed offenses.
4. Prohibiting the use of corporal punishment, restraints, seclusion or physical abuse against students.
5. Ending the regular presence of law enforcement in schools by removing any law enforcement personnel that are assigned to be present on a regular basis in and around a school or set of schools during regular school hours and any school-run activities in the building (see Section 3.3 on Law Enforcement and Criminalization in School Environments).
6. Ensuring that students, parents or guardians, and teachers know and understand all of the school norms, expectations, rules and disciplinary processes. Schools and districts shall:
 - a. Ensure that every student and parent or guardian receives a copy of the discipline policies and student Code of Conduct before school starts or within the student’s first week of school. Students that transfer schools or register late throughout the year must receive the policies within a week of registration.
 - b. Host student assemblies or other school-wide forums at each school at least twice per school year to communicate positive core values and behavioral expectations and to explain in an age-appropriate manner the discipline policies and Code of Conduct.
 - c. Conduct classroom lessons on the core values, behavioral expectations and discipline policies at least once a year.
 - d. Hold informational sessions for parents, including one before the start of the school year and at least twice per school year at each school, regarding the discipline policies and Code of Conduct, including:

- i. A clear explanation of the range of disciplinary responses, including preventive and positive approaches to school discipline, suspension, expulsion and referral to law enforcement, students' and parents' rights and responsibilities, and culturally responsive classroom management strategies;
- ii. Due process and appeal procedures, including parents' rights within the disciplinary process and how parents can file complaints regarding disciplinary incidents;
- iii. The school's and district's efforts to reduce exclusionary discipline and racial disparities in discipline referrals and consequences; and
- iv. An opportunity to raise any questions or concerns about the fairness, equity, or clarity of the district's administration of discipline.

D. Schools shall be Trauma Sensitive¹¹¹ by directly engaging the whole school community in addressing the root causes of trauma¹¹² and dedicating resources to improving students' behavioral health¹¹³ using the strategies listed below. Schools should ensure that students who have experienced trauma are not stigmatized or viewed as having a deficit. Rather, schools should use a healing-centered engagement approach that builds upon the strengths and particular resiliency of each individual student and seeks to address some of the root causes of trauma in the healing process.¹¹⁴ This includes:

1. Training administrators, teachers and support staff, including behavior specialists, to understand the sources of trauma, identify the signs of trauma, and be aware of the services and interventions most effective for responding to trauma.¹¹⁵
 - a. Staff should understand that students who have experienced trauma may be particularly sensitive to changes in routines, general lack of structure, or other potentially overwhelming situations.
 - b. Schools should work to keep a predictable schedule, avoid disruptions as much as possible, and where they are unavoidable, communicate clearly and work directly with students who have experienced trauma to support them through unexpected challenges (examples could range from sudden changes to their class schedule, to a death in the school community or fire/active shooter drills¹¹⁶).
2. Establishing a School Climate and Culture Leadership Team (detailed in Appendix and Section 3.7.a Model Policies on School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports), that includes staff trained on responding to trauma and parents of students with behavioral health challenges, to address behavioral health needs of individual students and the student body as a whole by planning, coordinating and evaluating services within the school.
3. Developing trauma-sensitive discipline policies, including:
 - a. Using positive disciplinary approaches, including School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support¹¹⁷, counseling, Restorative Justice Practices, guidance interventions and other non-exclusionary practices, as a primary response to student misbehavior;
 - b. Balancing accountability with understanding of traumatic behavior so that students are not penalized for behavior that is actually a direct response to trauma triggers; and
 - c. Minimizing disruption to education that results from disciplinary responses.¹¹⁸
4. Integrating trauma-sensitive strategies into the whole school climate so that all students gain skills around emotional self-regulation and healthy responses to stressors, including:¹¹⁹
 - a. Culturally affirming social and emotional learning (explained in detail above);
 - b. Integrating "brain breaks" into the day;
 - c. Giving students practice in transitioning from different energy levels for different kinds of activities (for example: giving a speech to the class then transitioning to working independently on a written assignment);
 - d. Making sure students have opportunities for physical activity ranging from high-energy activities to stretching or breathing exercises during class; and
 - e. "Peace Corners" or "Cool-down Kits" in classrooms that allow students to notice their own stress levels begin to rise and practice how to take steps to self-regulate through using available self-care items like

scented lotions, weighted blankets, pinwheels for breathing exercises and anything that may help students release stress for 5-10 minutes so they can return to their class work.

5. Linking students who may have experienced trauma to mental health professionals and services within the school and community, including ensuring access to the counseling, supports and accommodations at school guaranteed in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and to early intervening services funded through the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act.¹²⁰
6. Using a youth-centered cross-systems approach that supports students and their families if they must engage with multiple systems, including the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.¹²¹

E. States, districts and schools shall provide training, resources and monitoring to ensure implementation of positive school climates and discipline practices and policies, including:

1. Ensuring that staff at the district level responsible for overseeing design and implementation of the positive discipline policies, as well as school staff responsible for carrying them out, are trained in the theory, principles and strategies of evidence-based culturally-affirming social and emotional learning (SEL) culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate instruction and classroom management, the causes of and effective responses to trauma, positive and restorative approaches to discipline, youth development and other strategies for creating positive school climates.¹²²
2. Providing ongoing support and technical assistance for schools to implement and monitor positive approaches (See Chapter 5 on Data, Monitoring and Accountability).¹²³
3. Creating a Code of Ethics or Code of Professional Standards for teachers and other staff to promote positive interactions between teachers, students, parents, staff and administrators.
4. Working to provide families and youth training on integrating positive approaches to discipline in school with positive discipline approaches at home and in community institutions.

⁹³ See *id.* at art. 28 (requiring that governments take “appropriate measures” to ensure that school discipline safeguards the child’s human dignity, and that discipline is consistent with the treaty as a whole); *id.* at art. 38 (protecting children from all forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and punishment); *id.* at art. 40 (requiring that children accused of breaking the law must also be treated with dignity, and that any punishment be administered with the goal of reintegration into society).

⁹⁴ See U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 29 (1989) (including the teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the development of personality, abilities, and respect for parents among educational goals).

⁹⁵ CASEL. The Impact of Enhancing Students Social and Emotional Learning (2011). Available at: <https://casel.org/the-impact-of-enhancing-students-social-and-emotional-learning-a-meta-analysis-of-school-based-universal-interventions/>.

⁹⁶ Prevention efforts include support for particularly vulnerable families, involvement of schools in teaching basic values, and extending special care and attention to young persons at risk.

⁹⁷ Collaborative For Academic, Social, And Emotional Learning (CASEL), WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)?, available at <http://casel.org/why-it-matters/what-is-sel/>.

⁹⁸ American Institutes for Research (2014) Trauma-Informed Care and Trauma-Specific Services: A Comprehensive Approach to Trauma Intervention.

⁹⁹ *IBID.*

¹⁰⁰ Shawn Ginwright, “The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement” (2018). Available at: <https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>

¹⁰¹ See generally Ctr. For Soc. & Emotional Educ. & Nat’l Ctr. For Learning & Citizenship, The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap Between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and Teacher Education Policy (2007), available at <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-challenge.pdf>.

¹⁰² REL Midwest. Integrating an Equity Focus into Social and Emotional Learning. Available at: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_MW_Integrating_a_Focus_on_Equity_into_Social_and_Emotional_Learning.pdf

¹⁰³ Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, Implementation Guidance (2011), available at <http://casel.org/in-schools/implementation/implementation-guidance/>. Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O’Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J., Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social and emotional learning, *American Psychologist*, 58, 466–474 (2003).

¹⁰⁴ Collaborative for Academic, Social, And Emotional Learning (CASEL), Skills & Competencies, available at <http://casel.org/why-it-matters/what-is-sel/skills-competencies/>.

- ¹⁰⁵ Simmons, Dena. Why We Can't Afford Whitewashed SEL. (2019) Available at: http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education_update/apr19/vol61/num04/Why_We_Can%27t_Afford_Whitewashed_Social-Emotional_Learning.aspx.
- ¹⁰⁶ National Equity Project. Social and Emotional Learning Equity. Available at: <https://nationalequityproject.org/about/social-emotional-learning-equity>.
- ¹⁰⁷ See generally Fredericks, L. ET AL., Ideas and Tools for Working with Parents and Families, Collaborative For Academic, Social And Emotional Learning, (2005), available at <http://case1.org/publications/sel-parent-packet-ideas-and-tools-for-working-with-parents-and-families-full-packet/>
- ¹⁰⁸ See Am. Bar Ass'n Comm'n On Youth At Risk & Am. Bar Ass'n Comm'n On Homelessness & Poverty, Resolution 118B, available at <http://www.abanow.org/wordpress/wp-content/themes/ABANow/wp-content/uploads/resolution-pdfs/118B.pdf> [hereinafter RESOLUTION 118B] (calling for implementation of "evidence-based preventive school-wide practices for improving student behavior and creating a safe school climate more conducive to learning").
- ¹⁰⁹ See generally L.A. UNIFIED SCH. DIST., Discipline Foundation Policy: School Wide Positive Behavior Support (2007). Available at: http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/page/ca_laUSD/fldr_organizations/student_health_human_services/shhs/discipline_policy/discipline_policy_presentations/discipline_policy_presentations_introduction/basic%20policy%201.pdf.
- ¹¹⁰ See generally Am. Bar. Ass'n Juvenile Justice Comm., ABA Zero Tolerance Policy Report (2010), available at <http://www.maine.gov/education/speced/tools/b4se/reports/discipline/policyaba.pdf>.
- ¹¹¹ Fix School Discipline Coalition. Available at: <http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/trauma/>.
- ¹¹² Dorado, J., Martinez, M., McArthur, L., & Leibovitz, T. (2016). Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS): A whole-school, multi-level, prevention and intervention program for creating trauma-informed, safe and supportive schools. *School Mental Health*, 8, 163-176. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12310-016-9177-0>.
- ¹¹³ ACES Too High, Massachusetts, Washington State Lead U.S. Trauma-Sensitive School Movement, available at <http://acestoohigh.com/2012/05/31/massachusetts-washington-state-lead-u-s-trauma-sensitive-school-movement>.
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- ¹¹⁸ See generally Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School, Helping Traumatized Children Learn (2009), available at http://www.massadvocates.org/documents/HTCL_9-09.pdf.
- ¹¹⁹ Fix school Discipline Webinar: Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences in School Discipline. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR5NFDUBEtY>.
- ¹²⁰ Losen, Daniel J. And Tia Elena Martinez, Out of School & Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools, 27 (2013), available at http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools/OutOfSchool-OffTrack_UCLA_4-8.pdf. Also see General Accounting Office, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Standards Needed to Improve Identification of Racial and Ethnic Overrepresentation in Special Education, GAO-13-137 (2013), available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/652437.pdf>.
- ¹²¹ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform: Cross System Collaboration (2014) Available at: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//cross_system_collaboration.pdf.
- ¹²² See generally Elizabeth Sullivan & Elizabeth Keeney, Nat'l Econ. & Soc. Rights Initiative & Teachers Unite, Teachers Talk: School Culture, Safety, And Human Rights (2008), available at http://www.nesri.org/sites/default/files/Teachers_Talk.pdf.
- ¹²³ See generally Nat'l Univ. of Ireland, Galway, Pilot Implementation of Restorative Practices in Post-Primary Schools in The Northwest Region (2006), available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=successful+training+for+restorative+practices+teacher&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>.