



PREVENTING VIOLENCE  
AND DEVELOPING  
YOUTH LEADERS

March 28, 2017

The Honorable Benjamin Allen  
Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Education  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Fax: (916) 445-7799

RE: Support for SB 607 (Skinner) – As Amended Reducing  
Suspensions/Expulsions for Minor Incidents

Dear Senator Allen:

Youth ALIVE! is writing in strong support of SB 607 as amended, a bill that would amend the Education Code to address the overuse of suspensions and expulsions for minor and subjectively imposed offenses pursuant to Educ. Code § 48900(k). Currently, Section 48900(k) allows students in grades 4-12 to be suspended from school for disruption or defiance. Neither disruption nor defiance is defined anywhere in the Education Code; as such, Section 48900(k) is largely left to the subjective judgment of school personnel. It is estimated that this category was identified as the most “severe” grounds for some 129,835 suspensions or 31% of all suspensions in the state during the 2014-15 school year.

Youth ALIVE! is a violence prevention and intervention organization that helps young people become leaders and advocates for the change they would like to see in their communities through our Teens on Target Program; mentors and supports healing for young people on probation and/or who have been violently injured, through our Caught in the Crossfire program; and works with families grieving in the wake of a homicide through our Khadafy Washington Project. Youth ALIVE! works closely with young people and understand the need to limit the disruption of their education based on subjective behavioral standards.

In 2014, AB 420 was chaptered into law prohibiting the use of disruption/defiance as grounds for K-3 suspensions and K-12 expulsions but it is scheduled to sunset on July 1, 2018. AB 420 resulted in a 60% drop in defiance/disruption suspensions in elementary schools during 2013-2015. More than 15,000 suspensions of K-3 students were prevented, incentivizing school districts to adopt non-punitive alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. SB 607 would permanently eliminate suspensions and expulsions for all grade levels and keep more students in schools.

If SB 607 is not passed, all students will again be subject to suspension and expulsion based on “disruption/defiance,” which means students will be suspended or expelled from school and denied valuable learning time for anything from failing to turn in homework, not paying attention, refusing to follow directions, or swearing in class—and even for just one isolated incident.

Youth ALIVE! is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Our Tax ID is 94-3143254.

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Because it is so subjective, suspensions and expulsions based on Section 48900(k) raise serious concerns about their disproportionate impact on students of color and other vulnerable student groups—including students with disabilities and/or those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), and/or gender non-conforming. Research confirms that there is even greater disproportionality for students in these groups suspended and expelled for low level, subjective offenses like defiance/disruption, compared to higher level, more objective offenses. Data made available by the California Department of Education reveals that African-American students in California face nearly 4 times more suspensions per 100 students than white students for disruption/defiance.

More than two decades of research has confirmed that suspensions do not work. They do not improve student behavior and, in fact, often exacerbate the problem, as the children who are disciplined for these offenses often come from homes with the least supervision and have themselves experienced violence and other trauma that they are struggling to address without support. The research is clear that suspended and expelled students who are subjected are far more likely than their peers to drop out of school and enter the juvenile delinquency system, at great cost to the state. Research also shows that alternatives to suspension and expulsion—such as Restorative Practices, tiered interventions through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and social emotional learning—reduce suspensions, improve behavior, and improve academic outcomes.

This bill does not limit other Education Code provisions that are more clearly defined, including the ability to suspend or expel students in grades 4 to 12 for harassment, threats, and intimidation that rise to the level of materially disrupting classwork, creating substantial disorder, and invading the rights of students and school personnel by creating a hostile education environment (Educ. Code § 48900.4).

Overall, the bill leaves in place more than 20 other reasons a student may be suspended from school or recommended for expulsion. This measure will result in an overall reduction in suspensions and expulsions and an increase in positive outcomes for students and the communities in which they live. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Anne Marks  
Executive Director

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