College-Ready Writers Program

Writing Task

**Day 1 Reading Packet B**

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| **Discipline and Learning** |



Student first name: Student last name:

Teacher name: Class period:

Grade level:

8th 9th 10th

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| **PROMPT FOR WRITING** |
| **B. Discipline and Learning**  School discipline is in the news because students who break simple rules are sometimes punished in the same ways as students who commit crimes at school. What discipline policy would you recommend to your School Board to make sure that all students have a chance to learn? Why?  Write an argument. Use ideas and evidence from the reading packet to support your argument. Use what you have learned about citing and quoting sources in your writing  The audience for your argument is the President of your School Board. |

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| **DIRECTIONS** |
| * This packet is part of a two-day writing task. * Today you will analyze the readings to learn about different opinions on this topic. On Day 2, you will write an argument that supports your opinion in response to the prompt above. * Use the space provided in the margins to take notes on the readings. * On p. 12, you will find definitions for vocabulary words. These words are ***italicized*** in the text. * Use the space on p. 13 to plan your argument for Day 2. |

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**Reading 1**

# Introduction

Discipline in our schools has always been an issue. Students who fight, interrupt classes with violent behavior, or bring drugs or weapons to school are often committing crimes that interfere with safety and learning opportunities of other students. They are usually removed from school for a period of time. Today, however, in some schools, students who break rules of procedure— being tardy, not completing assignments, walking the hallways or sleeping during class—are punished in the same harsh ways. They are also being removed from classrooms, from opportunities for learning. There are people who are thinking about fairness in school, about how to fairly discipline students who step “outside the lines” in minor ways and about how to deal with the behavior of students who make schools unsafe for others—who also need to learn. The articles in this packet will help you to understand the issues around fairness in balancing discipline with opportunities for learning.

***Source:*** NWP CRWP

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**Reading 2**

**Disruptions in Syracuse Schools Spur Debate over Discipline, Suspensions**

By [Paul Riede](http://connect.syracuse.com/staff/priede/posts.html)   
  
Syracuse teachers say the level of disruption in their schools has ratcheted up this year, and the district has not acted forcefully enough to bring order to their hallways and classrooms. . . . Students who cause disruptions are often disciplined only lightly, if at all, and are quickly back in their classrooms.

But . . . a recently released [national study](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)  highlights Syracuse’s relatively high – and racially skewed – suspension rates.

Teachers say none of that seems to change what they see every day in their schools. . . . They say children at all levels are more apt to fight, talk back to teachers and be generally disrespectful, and that makes it more difficult for others to learn.

The teachers . . . described schools where students roam the halls when they should be in class, talk back to teachers, and get into fights that can endanger other children.

Unruly students may be removed from the classroom for a few days, but they soon return and cause further disruption, a teacher said. “They either come back or they get moved to another building with no ***consequence***.”

Parent Mary Handley said, “There have been incidents in the hallway that compromise the safety of all the kids, but particularly the smaller kids,” she said, adding, “A 16-year-old eighth-grader is a big kid.”

Handley and the teachers . . . said there is a pervasive feeling that district leaders want to keep discipline numbers down and that referring students for disciplinary hearings is discouraged. . . .

In fact, Superintendent Contreras said, “I see the number of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions, so I know that the principals are acting,” she said. . . . Overall, 4,210 students were suspended in 2011-12. Many were suspended more than once, for a total of 9,998 suspensions that year.

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Both numbers were higher than the numbers for the year before.

The numbers show that black and Latino students get suspended at much higher rates than white and Asian students. . . .

**Why the disruptions?**

Although Contreras said she has no data to conclude that discipline problems have increased to the extent teachers say, she . . . has been hearing about slow responses by building administrators to discipline referrals. . . . Principals have told her that there are more disruptions in math classes this year. . . . Class sizes are larger. . . . .

Teachers offer another explanation: Students are seeing that there are few ***consequences*** to their disrespectful behavior, so they feel free to continue it. Some teachers say they have become so frustrated . . . that they rarely refer children to the office anymore.

**Alternatives needed**

Contreras said her committee recommended seeking an external evaluation of the district’s discipline procedures. . . . Kevin Ahern, President of the Syracuse Teachers Association, agrees that suspension is not the best solution. But neither, he says, is allowing chronically disruptive students to stay in classrooms where other children are trying to learn.

“We’ve got to have alternative programs for the kids,” he said. . . .

Handley, the parent, agrees – to a point.

“It is true that suspension doesn’t help, because it’s just sending a kid home for a few days,” she said. “But what it does help is it gives the building at least some relief for a few days to put together a plan of how to deal with this.”

***Source:*** Riede, Paul. “Disruptions in Syracuse Schools Spur Debate over Discipline, Suspensions.” *The Post-Standard*., Syracuse.com , 9 May 2013.

updated 9 January 2014. Web. 15 March 2014.

***About the author:*** Paul Riede is a reporter for the Syracuse Post.

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**Reading 3**

**Seeing the Toll, Schools Revise *Zero Tolerance***

By [Lizette](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/lizette_alvarez/index.html) Alvarez

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. —Get-tough policies in schools are leading to arrest records, low academic achievement and high dropout rates that especially affect minority students, so cities and school districts around the country are rethinking their approach to minor offenses. . . .

Rather than push children out of school, districts are now doing the opposite: choosing to keep law breaking students in school, away from trouble on the streets, and offering them counseling and assistance aimed at changing behavior.

In Broward Schools, which had more than 1,000 arrests in the 2011 school year, the school district entered into a wide-ranging agreement last month with local law enforcement, the juvenile justice department and civil rights groups like the N.A.A.C.P. to overhaul its disciplinary policies and de-emphasize punishment…

Nationwide, more than 70 percent of students involved in arrests or referrals to court are black or Hispanic, according to federal data.

“What you see is the beginning of a national trend here,” said Michael Thompson, the director of the Council of State Governments Justice Center. “Everybody recognizes that if we want to find ways to close the achievement gap, we . . . need to look at the huge number of kids being removed from school.”

Some view the shift as politically driven and worry that the pendulum may swing too far in the other direction. Ken Trump, a school [police] consultant, said that while existing policies are at times misused by schools and officers, the policies mostly work well, offering schools the right amount of discretion.

“It’s a political movement by civil rights organizations that have targeted school police,” Mr. Trump said. “If you politicize this on either side, it’s not going to help on the front lines.”

Supporters, though, emphasize the flexibility in these new policies and stress that they do not apply to students who commit felonies or pose a danger.

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“We are not taking these tools out of the toolbox;” said Russell Skiba, a school psychology professor at Indiana University, ”these should be tools of last resort.”

In Broward County, the shift has shown immediate results . . . . School-based arrests have dropped by 41 percent, and suspensions, which in 2011 added up to 87,000 out of 258,000 students, are down 66 percent from 2012.

Nor do students face suspension for minor ***infractions***. Instead, they attend a program called Promise for three days or more. Repeat offenders get several chances to change their behavior before more punitive measures kick in.

One afternoon, an 18-year-old . . . girl had been caught with a small amount of marijuana in her car on her high school campus, a misdemeanor that would have led to a suspension or arrest in the past. It was the first time she had gotten in trouble at school.

“I was freaking out,” she said. . . Here, though, she saw the larger picture and came to view the incident as “her second chance.”

Other students here learn to manage their anger, if that is their issue. Parents are involved in the process. And counselors have helped identify problems at home including abusive situations, something that administrators said underscores how invaluable the counseling component has been for the Promise program. . . .

***Source:*** Alvarez, Lizette. “Seeing the Toll, Schools Revise Zero Tolerance*.” New York Times*. New York Times, 2 December 2013, Web. 2 March 2014.

***About the author:*** Lizette Alvarez has been the Miami bureau chief for The New York Times since January 2011.

**Reading 4**

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**Rethinking School Discipline**

By Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education,

January 8, 2014

(*The following excerpt is from a speech written by Arne Duncan, current Secretary of Education. Mr. Duncan delivered the speech to educators as well as students at Frederick Douglas High School.)*

. . . Racial discrimination in school discipline is a real problem today, and not just an issue from 40 to 50 years ago. We must tackle these brutal truths head on—that is the only way to change the reality that our children face every day.

There is no single formula; no silver bullet for ensuring school discipline is equitable and effective. . . The need to rethink and redesign school discipline practices is long overdue. Too many schools resort too quickly to exclusion, even for minor misbehaviors.

***Exclusionary discipline*** is so common that in some cases, pre-K students as young as three- and four-years old are getting suspended. . . . In Maryland, 91 pre-K students were suspended or expelled during the 2011-12 school year.

Schools should remove students from the classroom as a last resort, and only for serious ***infractions***, like endangering the safety of other students. Unfortunately today, suspensions and expulsions are not primarily used as a last resort for serious infractions. A landmark study in Texas found . . . a majority of students were suspended or expelled at least once between 7th and 12th grade.

Nationwide, as many as 95 percent of out-of-school suspensions are for nonviolent misbehavior--like being disruptive, acting disrespectfully, tardiness, profanity, and dress code violations.

Let me be clear—these are all issues that must be dealt with effectively, and with a sense of urgency when they arise. But I would ask, is putting children out of school the best remedy, the best solution to the problem? In California, nearly half of the more than 700,000 suspensions statewide in the 2011-12 school year were for, quote, “willful defiance.”

. . . In recent years, secondary schools have suspended or expelled an estimated two million students a year. That is a staggering amount of lost learning time--and lost opportunity to provide support.

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Making matters worse, ***exclusionary discipline*** is applied disproportionately to children of color and students with disabilities. Educationally, and morally, that … is simply unacceptable.

Our department’s Civil Rights Data Collection shows that African-American students . . . are more than three times as likely as their white peers to be expelled or suspended.

We can, and must, do much better. This guidance package—spelling out three guiding principles for equitable school discipline—is so important.

Those three guiding principles are simple and straightforward.

First, schools and districts should take deliberate steps to build positive school climates to prevent misbehavior and target student supports help address underlying causes of misbehavior--like trauma, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

. . . Schools should be training staff, engaging families and community partners, and deploying financial resources to help students develop the ***resolution skills*** they need to avoid or ***de-escalate*** problems. As ***Frederick Douglass*** famously said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Grit, resilience, conflict resolution skills—these are all skills that can be taught and learned, and are as important to long-term success as reading, writing, and math.

The second principle is that schools and districts should ensure that clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and ***consequences*** are in place, both to prevent and to address misbehavior.

And schools should be seeking to provide differing levels of support and *interventions* to students, based on their needs—we know some students need more intensive support than others. The one-size-fits-all mentality simply doesn’t work.

The third and final principle is that school leaders and educators should strive to ensure fairness and equity for all students through continuous improvement.

. . . Too many times, schools, districts, and states fail to follow these guiding principles. And the overuse of suspensions and expulsions has taken a terrible toll on students, families, schools, and communities.

Suspended students are less likely to graduate on time--and are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school, and become involved in the juvenile justice system.

The school-to-prison pipeline must be challenged every day. In Texas, a single suspension or expulsion . . . almost tripled a student’s likelihood of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.. . .

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Students want and need clear boundaries, structure, and consistency. They need to feel safe and respected. It is always the right thing to set high expectations for students, not just in academic terms, but for their behavior and conduct.

No school can be a great school if it is not first a safe school, and no teacher or student should ever feel unsafe or unable to concentrate on teaching and learning. . . .

Schools continue to be among our safest institutions for children, and violence and crime has declined in schools during the last decade. But a substantial subset of middle- and high schools still has unacceptable levels of violence, and bullying is far too common.

Ultimately, the guiding principles and action steps we have outlined today are just a starting point for creating safe schools, where teachers can concentrate on teaching and where students are in class and learning. . . .

***Thurgood Marshall***, proud alum of Frederick Douglass High, said that “None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody—a parent, a teacher . . . bent down and helped us pick up our boots.”

So, let us all reach out to help all our children pick up their boots and build positive futures for themselves.

***Source:*** Duncan, Arne. Speech . “Rethinking School Discipline.” Release of the *Joint DOJ-ED School Discipline Guidance Package.* The Academies at Frederick Douglass High School, Baltimore, MD., 8 January, 2014. Web. 5 March 2014.

***About the author:*** Arne Duncan was appointed by President Obama as Secretary of Education in 2009.

**Reading 5**

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| 1 Total crimes includes violent crimes (rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) as well as crimes such as theft, purse-snatching, and attempted thefts. |
| 2 Due to methodological changes, use caution when comparing 2006 estimates to other years. |
| ***Source:*** U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 1992–2011.  **Take notes below:**  What do you notice about the amount of school crime in the 1990’s as compared to 2010 and 2011? |

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**Vocabulary**

***consequence:*** something that happens as a result of a

particular action or set of conditions.

***de-escalate:***to make smaller or less intense

***exclusionary discipline:*** punishment that bars students from

the school setting

***Frederick Douglass:*** (born Frederick Augustus Washington

Bailey, c. February 1818 – February 20, 1895) was an African-

American social reformer, [orator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orator), writer and [statesman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politician). After

escaping from [slavery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery), he became a leader of the

[abolitionist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolitionism_in_the_United_States) movement, gaining note for his dazzling

oratory and incisive antislavery writing. *Source: Wikipedia*

***infraction:*** an act that breaks a rule or law

***resolution skills:*** knowing how to manage conflict in a

positive way

***Thurgood Marshall:*** (July 2, 1908 – January 24, 1993) was

an [Associate Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Associate_Justice_of_the_Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States) of the [United States Supreme Court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Supreme_Court), was

serving from October 1967 until October 1991. Marshall was

the Court's [96th justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Justices_of_the_Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States) and its [first](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_African-American_firsts) [African American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American) justice.

*Source: Wikipedia*

***zero tolerance:*** a policy that imposes automatic punishment for ***infractions*** of a stated rule, withthe intention of eliminating undesirable conduct.

**Planning Your Argument**

School discipline is in the news because students who break simple rules are sometimes punished in the same ways as students who commit crimes at school. What discipline policy would you recommend to your School Board to make sure that all students have a chance to learn? Why?

Use this space to:

* Write your claim.
* Select and organize evidence from the readings that you will use to write your argument on Day 2.