***Student Sample 4, Grade 9***

***We Need to Be Fair***

**When it comes to discussing about balancing discipline with opportunities for learning, we need to be fair. We need to think about how much learning [they’re] losing when they get expelled or suspended. We can’t racially discriminate anyone in any way. We should only suspend or expel children if it’s our last chance or if they commit a serious crime.**

**In Syracuse schools, children are getting suspended or expelled for fighting, talking back, tardies, roaming halls, and being disrespectful. Now, I can see getting suspended for fighting because it endangers other students but tardies or roaming the halls? They should only get ASD for that. That way they don’t miss any learning.**

**In the years 2011 and 2012, in Syracuse schools, they were over 4,210 students suspended. Many were suspended more than once, for a total of 9,998 suspensions that year. Superintendent Contreas says “I see the number of in-school-suspensions and out-of-school suspensions, so I know that the principals are acting.” Kevin Ahem, President of the Syracuse Teachers Association, agrees that “suspension is definitely not the best solution. But neither is allowing chronically disruptive students to stay in classrooms where other children are trying to learn.” He says, “We’ve got to have alternative programs for the kids.”**

**Honestly, children should only get suspended if they do something TERRIBLE or if it’s the teacher’ last “hope” to set them straight. Some districts are “choosing to keep law breaking students in school, away from trouble on the streets, and offering them counseling and assistance aimed at changing behavior. “Almost 70% of students involved in arrests or referrals to court are black or Hispanic.**

**But just because they’re a different race doesn’t mean we should discriminate them. We must help them just like we do everyone else. Russel Skiba says “We are not taking these tools out of the toolbox. These should be tools of last resort.”**

**Some schools have a group called “Promise.” Repeat offenders get several chances to change their behavior before more punitive measures kick in. In one school, an 18 year old had been caught with a small amount of marijuana in her car on her high school campus. She didn’t get the original punishment, suspension or arrest, she got to go to the “Promise” group.**

**Exclusionary discipline is so common that in some cases, pre-K students (as young as three) are getting suspended!!! Schools should only remove students from class as a last resort. 95% of our-of-school suspensions are for nonviolent behavior such as being disruptive, acting disrespectfully, tardiness, profanity, and dress code violations. In recent years, secondary schools have suspended an estimated two million students a year. We need to strive to ensure fairness and equity for all students because one size fits all mentality simply doesn’t work. Our children need to feel safe and respected. It’s always nice to set high expectations for students in academic terms, behavior, and conduct. “No school can be a great school if it is not first a safe school.” As Thurgood Marshall says, “None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. Somebody was there to help us.”**