

April 26, 2021

Dear Distinguished Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am writing to express my most ardent support for LD 474. As a school board member and as a retired elementary school counselor I cannot stress enough the importance of giving our youngest students the support they need to learn, and I emphasize learn, how to negotiate the dynamics that exist in a school setting. If nothing else Covid-19 has taught us that schools create behavior problems not children. The marked decrease in suspensions during this period clearly demonstrates that when students are getting what they need in terms of space and attention behavioral issues are greatly diminished, almost to the point of disappearing completely.

Developmentally 5-10 year olds are concrete thinkers and at the earliest stages are egocentric thinkers. So what it feels like to them is what is real. As they continue to grow in this period they only **begin** to think about how other people might think and feel. They also **begin** to understand that their thoughts are unique to them and that not everyone else necessarily shares their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. And bingo. Here is exactly where they can **begin** to learn through restorative interventions. Let's give them a good beginning.

In Title 20-A §1001 Duties of school boards you state discipline needs to focus on restorative interventions that "help students learn from their mistakes, understand the impact of their actions on others and find opportunities to repair the harm they have caused through their misbehavior;" which is a powerful statement. But moving beyond policy and into practice almost always requires some nudging. If we want children to learn to do things differently we need adults to learn how to do things differently. Supporting LD 474 would do that.

And. The research is clear. There is a school to prison pipeline. The conditioning starts early. Punitive measures used as discipline do nothing more than *teach* a young child that they do not belong, they are the problem, authority figures are not to be trusted. Suspension denies their humanity. It says they cannot make mistakes. It tells them they are not welcome.

All this being said, of course there are times when the safety of others, students and staff, is of utmost importance. It may be necessary to temporarily remove a student. But as a tool of discipline loss of recess, suspension whether in-school or out-of-school is ineffective in reducing behavior problems in schools. There is no valid or reliable peer reviewed research supporting such measures at this level of schooling.

It is my sincere hope that you will conclude LD 474 ought to pass.

Sincerely,
Mary Anne Royal
Winterport

