The Young Student Exclusion Ban Act aims to improve educational outcomes by banning Massachusetts public schools from suspending or expelling students in Pre-K through 3rd grade. This ban would not cover incidents involving assaults on school adults, felony charges, dangerous weapons, or drugs, and instead ensures that students aren’t excluded for low level offenses – as when a kindergartener was suspended for shutting a door that accidentally caught a teacher’s hand – which can be effectively addressed by alternative means. The bill expands this exclusion ban to 4th grade one year after enactment, and to 5th grade two years after enactment.

Why is a ban on exclusionary discipline in the early grades necessary?

- Excluding students from school early predicts expulsion or suspension in later grades and contributes to students’ poor academic performance and failure to graduate on time.\(^3\)
- Children need to be in the classroom as they build their educational foundation and learn to read. One in six children who are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate 4x greater than that for proficient readers.\(^4\)
- An early grades suspension and expulsion ban is necessary to address long standing inequities, and opportunity and achievement gaps in education.

What are the alternatives?

- This bill requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide guidance and support to school districts and school staff on alternatives to suspension and expulsion such as restorative justice and other forms of conflict resolution.
- Alternatives like restorative practices are particularly important now, as young students return from the traumatic experience of virtual learning due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Has this ever been done before? YES!

- Starting in the 2019–2020 school year, Massachusetts’ largest public school district – Boston Public Schools – instituted a ban on the suspension of all students in kindergarten through 2nd grade and banned suspensions of 3rd through 5th grade students for non-serious offenses.
- Nine other states and 10 municipalities have already instituted similar bans on the use of exclusionary discipline for young students. It’s time for the state of Massachusetts to catch up!

Questions? Contact Melanie Rush at melanie@massappleseed.org or Leon Smith at leonsmith@cfjj.org.


[2] Current law prohibits expulsion for these minor offenses, but does allow for suspension.


[5] All data listed here are based upon the 2018-2019 school year.