

## Recommendations for Revisions to Hillsborough County School Discipline Policies and Practices

January 25, 2008

### 1. **Limit the Offenses Resulting in Referral to Law Enforcement**

Almost every offense listed in the Student Code of Conduct includes the possibility of referral to law enforcement. We recommend stating explicitly that referral to law enforcement will be limited to only those offenses required by state law.

### 2. **Limit Out-of-School Suspensions to Serious Misconduct or When Low-Level Misconduct Has Become Habitual**

Even the most minor infractions in the Student Code of Conduct include the possibility of extended out-of-school suspensions. We recommend limiting the use of out-of-school suspension to serious misconduct, and utilizing in-school suspension, detention, or other less severe consequences for low-level misconduct.

### 3. **Cap Suspension Periods for Low-Level Offenses**

Every offense listed in the Student Code of Conduct carries the possibility of a ten-day out-of-school suspension. Such extended absences from school tend to have devastating effects on students' academic performance. We recommend capping the potential suspension periods for low-level misconduct, and using longer suspensions for only the most serious offenses.

### 4. **Limit Disciplinary Consequences for Conduct Off of School Property**

We recommend limiting the use of disciplinary consequences for conduct that occurs off of school property to only the most serious violations (Level One, for example) and when the misconduct seriously disrupts the school environment or seriously endangers the safety of other students or school personnel.

### 5. **Encourage Increased Use of Alternative-to-Suspension Programs, Prevention and Intervention Strategies**

While there is no credible evidence that suspensions and expulsions are effective at changing student behavior, there are a number of available alternatives that have been successful at promoting a productive learning environment, addressing disruptive behavior, and creating a safe school environment. We recommend devoting more resources to these proven techniques rather than ineffective, punitive strategies.

### 6. **Train Counselors, Principals, Assistant Principals, and School Resource Officers on the Consequences of an Arrest**

We have learned that most school officials and SROs are unaware of the full ramifications of a juvenile arrest. The Miami-Dade Public Defender's Office has produced a list of these consequences and has conducted a training session on them for all district SROs. We recommend that Hillsborough County do the same.

### 7. **Train School Resource Officers on Effectively Interacting With Youth and Children with Disabilities**

In our research we learned that most SROs receive little to no training on dealing with young people and, especially, young people with disabilities. It is essential that personnel working in the schools be equipped to understand the unique needs and behaviors of young people within the school environment. We recommend instituting a training curriculum that will better prepare SROs to interact with students.

### 8. **Clarify Relationship Between School Officials and School Resource Officers**

Our research in Hillsborough County and elsewhere has demonstrated a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of SROs. We recommend reviewing the agreements established between Hillsborough County Schools and local law enforcement agencies and more clearly delineating the relationship between the schools and law enforcement.

### 9. **Create School Discipline Oversight Committees**

We recommend forming school discipline oversight committees at the school and district level, comprised of school officials, parents, students, and interested community members. The responsibilities of the committees would include monitoring school and district performance at promoting a productive school climate and fair discipline practices through the review of school discipline and arrest statistics, and the handling of any complaints about school discipline practices.