

## GUIDELINE 3: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO SUSPENSION

Policies and procedures must consider alternative approaches before suspension. An in-school suspension must be identified as an alternative response to out-of-school suspension.

While the use of suspension is authorized in The Manitoba Public Schools Act, the rationale at the core and its efficacy is increasingly being questioned (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2020). As a result, schools and school division policies and procedures must consider alternative approaches before suspension (Manitoba Education and Training, *Provincial Code of Conduct*, 2017).

**It is in the best interests  
"of students and society to  
seek alternatives to out-of-  
school suspension whenever  
possible" (AAP, p. e1002).**

No single approach, program, or system may be exclusive to supporting students who are suspended. Rather, "supportive school discipline is a systemic constellation of programs and practices that promote positive behaviours while preventing negative or risky behaviours. It is positive rather than punitive and aims to create a safe learning environment that enhances all students' outcomes" (Education Development Center, 2012, p. 2).

In order to promote a safe, caring, and inclusive learning environment, schools must provide opportunities for students and staff to increase their understanding of behaviour and to learn to respond to unwanted behaviour in alternative ways. Supportive student discipline should be about teaching and learning. Rather than employing a suspension, the supportive strategies are used and reframed as learning opportunities, fulfilling a need the student has identified through their behaviour.

**"[Use] the restorative approach as an alternative, allowing all involved parties to have a civil conversation with an apology and explaining the effects of the misconduct" and that "a [better] alternative is school service, as it allows students to stay in school but also holds them accountable for their actions" (MEECL, *Report of the Student Advisory Council*, 2022, p. 12).**

Providing students an opportunity to reflect on their behaviour and repair relationships is paramount to this learning. Appropriate consequences and supports should help students improve behaviour while considering individual circumstances.

Schools are encouraged to seek relevant resources in implementing intervention and mediation strategies. Schools must focus on the implementation of evidence-based systems rooted in skill development and capacity building. A combination of approaches in the areas of social-emotional learning, positive behaviour supports, cultural relevancy, restorative practice and restitution, and trauma-informed practice can be applied.

As approaches to discipline will vary, school divisions should engage in conversation with school leaders, educators, and the broader school community, while also looking at data sources, to develop an idea of what approaches and strategies would most benefit their students, staff, and schools.

(See [\*Companion Guide for Safe and Caring Schools: A Policy Directive Enhancing Proactive Supports to Minimize the Use of Suspension\*](#))

**“The themes that are common to a successful approach include the development of a positive school climate, a positive school-wide approach, team planning, community involvement, and professional support” (Manitoba Education and Training, *Provincial Code of Conduct*, 2017, p. 8).**

## In-School Suspension as an Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension

For the purpose of offering a safe, structured, and supervised environment, an in-school suspension may be applied for a finite period of time in lieu of an out-of-school suspension when it is considered safe and appropriate (Noltemeyer & Ward, 2015).

An in-school suspension allows for the opportunity to apply targeted interventions and supports that address behaviour and facilitate problem solving. There is benefit to maintaining connection to the school community and adults in a safe environment and with uninterrupted learning.

Although an in-school suspension may be an alternative response to an out-of-school suspension, it is important to note that it is still viewed as a punishment and there are known associated negative outcomes to this exclusionary practice (Noltemeyer & Ward, 2015). Unintended consequences may arise, and stigma can emerge from labelling, alienation, and negative behaviours influenced by exclusion (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Further, negative consequences may be ineffective when overused (Manitoba Education and Training, *Provincial Code of Conduct*, 2017).