

Understanding School Discipline Policies

The district where your child attends school has developed a set of rules that are spelled out in the Student Code of Conduct. If you have not been provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct upon enrolling your child in school, you should request one from the school immediately. Navigating the Code of Conduct can be a difficult task, but the Code can be an important tool in advocating for your child in the school system.

Infractions and Consequences

The Code of Conduct typically includes a list of offenses or “infractions” which may lead to the discipline of a student. These infractions may range from minor offenses such as school bus disturbances and dress code violations to more serious violations such as possessing a weapon on school grounds. For each offense, the Code of Conduct will also include a list of consequences or disciplinary actions that the school may impose on a student if he or she violates the rules. These consequences also range from minor to more serious measures. For example, the school may choose to deal with an infraction by holding a parent-teacher conference. In contrast, if the violation is serious the principal may recommend the student for expulsion.

Ultimately, the school administration has the discretion as to what consequence your child will receive for an infraction of the Code of Conduct. In making this determination, the school will likely consider the child’s disciplinary history, the severity of the infraction, the frequency of the misbehavior, and the age of the student.

Advocating for Less Severe Consequences

If your child violates the Code of Conduct, the school may choose to suspend or expel your child. Many times the school jumps directly to the most severe consequences for a child’s misbehavior without considering many of the less severe options suggested in the Code of Conduct. As an advocate for your child, it is important that you are familiar with these options so that you may persuade the school to pursue a less severe consequence. Some of the consequences that are less severe than suspension or expulsion include the following:

- Creation of a behavior contract;
- Adjustment of student’s schedule;
- Loss of class privileges (e.g., computer time);
- Letter to the parent or guardian about the behavior;
- Conference with the student, administrator, counselor, guardian, and/or parent of the child about the behavior;
- In-school referral to the counselor;
- Supervised work assignments;
- Before-school, after-school, or Saturday detention;
- In-school suspension;
- Short-term placement in the alternative school

Due Process Requirements Upon Suspension or Expulsion

If the school administration makes the determination to suspend or expel your child, they must provide your child with “due process” protections prior to initiating the suspension or expulsion. This includes, at a minimum, notice of the accused misbehavior and an opportunity for the student to present his or her side of the story. The Recovery School District’s Code of Conduct, however, provides even more specific due process protections. Even with these protections written into the Code of Conduct, many times a school will simply tell a child not to return to school without following the appropriate procedures. As an advocate for your child, it is important that you remind the school to abide by the due process procedural policies set out in the Code of Conduct. The Recovery School District’s Code of Conduct specifies the following procedural protections:

- A conference shall be conducted by the principal or his designee prior to the suspension of any student unless the student’s actions present a danger to persons or property or threatens the interruption of the learning process.
- The conference shall be conducted with the principal or designee within a reasonable time.
- The principal or designee shall advise student of the accused misbehavior and reasons for the accusation. The student shall be given the opportunity to present his/her version of the incident. The principal or designee shall make a reasonable effort to reach a fair determination of the incident before making any disposition.
- The principal or designee shall make a reasonable effort using available resources to contact student’s parent or guardian when student is suspended or expelled.