



ISLAND TREES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Education
516-520-2100 x7

Superintendent
Charles J. Murphy

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES, 74 FARMEDGE ROAD, LEVITTOWN, NY 11756-5202

May 2, 2023

Dear New York State Legislators,

As members of the Island Trees Board of Education, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the "Judith Kaye School Solutions not Suspensions Act." This legislation is not only misguided, but it will also severely undermine our school administrators' ability to deal with very disruptive students. School administrators already face significant challenges in maintaining a safe and secure learning environment for all students.

While we strive to work with our challenging students to ensure they make sound decisions, there are instances where suspensions are necessary to protect the safety of our students and staff. However, the proposed law seeks to eliminate suspensions for K-3 students and reduce the length of suspensions for other students. Furthermore, it eliminates the ability to suspend students for willful disobedience and cutting classes or school. This legislation will only create more discipline issues in schools and do the opposite, making our schools unsafe for the students who want to be there and learn.

This proposal, akin to the failed New York State bail reform, also limits school suspensions to a maximum of 20 days, which is not enough of a consequence for the more severe and malicious acts that occur on school campuses. We have students who engage in such acts, and they have forfeited their privilege to attend school with the rule-abiding students.

For example, this year, we had a student who ambushed and assaulted another student, smashing a lacrosse stick over the other student's head, breaking the stick in half. What do we say to the victim's parents when that student is back in class in a few weeks? In some cases, the attacker may end up back in school more quickly than the injured one. Allowing them to return to school so quickly could create an unsafe learning environment for those who want to be in school and learn.

While our K-12 school staff work with our challenging students to ensure they make sound decisions, including restorative practices, there are instances where our principals need to suspend students in grades K-3. The proposed legislation fails to account for the reality of what happens in our schools. For instance, what would we tell parents when a third grader pummels a first grader on the school bus? We are already burdened with managing the challenges that come with dealing with such incidents, and the proposed law would only make it more difficult.

The proposed law also asks schools to develop Codes of Conduct. Schools have been mandated to develop and share these rules with their communities for over two decades. Prior to suspension, the law requires to provide parents with advanced notice of the charges, which has also been standard protocol for schools for decades. This concept isn't new for schools and has been a sound practice for years.

In a perfect world, all students would follow the Code of Conduct and treat each other with respect. Unfortunately, schools are not utopian societies, and a very small group of students negatively impact the learning environment. This legislation seeks to enable this group of students who create issues and turmoil in our schools, making little sense. Again, this law will create more discipline issues in schools and does the opposite of creating a safe and secure learning environment for students who want to be in school and learn.

Further, this bill does not even propose one dollar of support. It is another unfunded mandate that will fail our students. In fact, at a recent Nassau County Superintendent's meeting where the "Solutions Not Suspensions Act" was discussed, our school superintendent shared that, in fourteen years attending these meetings, the Nassau County superintendents have rarely agreed on any one topic. However, with this topic, they unanimously agreed that this act will harm students.

We implore you to reject this bill as it will harm New York students. School administrators are charged with the responsibility of creating safe and secure schools, and this legislation will make this task more challenging. Instead of helping the 99% of students who deserve a positive, safe learning environment, this legislation will enable the 1% of students who create issues and turmoil in our schools.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

Sincerely,

~ The Island Trees Board of Education

Michael T. Rich Jr.

Michael T. Rich Jr.
President, Board of Education

Amy Martin

Amy Martin
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