Document Analysis of Behavior Expectations and Disciplinary Action Policies of Public Preschools in Maine

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DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION POLICIES OF PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS IN MAINE

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors (Child Development and Family Relations)

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ABSTRACT

Student handbooks from public preschools in the state of Maine were collected to analyze what behavior expectations, disciplinary actions, suspension policies, expulsion policies were included, and to what degree of detail these policies were explained in student handbooks. A document analysis framework was utilized to collect and interpret the data. The document analysis framework has two different content analysis techniques, and a content analysis technique was utilized to determine the number of times specific words or phrases were utilized in each of the 72 student handbooks. Key terms were chosen in order to quantify the frequency of words used in these handbooks, and whether or not these key terms provided adequate information regarding the behavior expectations and disciplinary actions of preschool aged children. These key terms include: behavior expectations, code of conduct, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Physical Restraint and Seclusion - Policy JKAA, disciplinary action, suspension, and expulsion.

Based on the content analysis technique, there is no continuity amongst public preschool student handbooks in the state of Maine was found regarding behavior expectations, disciplinary actions, suspension policies, and expulsion policies. Further reform of these policies is needed in order to frame a positive learning environment for young children in order for them to succeed in the academic setting.
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PURPOSE OF STUDY

The education system does not benefit all children who are involved in it, and in numerous ways they are set up for failure. A student’s race, gender, disabilities, age, socioeconomic status, trauma, and behavior are some of the factors that can affect a child’s experience in the classroom. Policies in student handbooks such as behavior expectations, disciplinary actions, suspension policies, and expulsion policies can also negatively affect school climate, achievement, development, and ability to function in the academic setting. Young children should not be subjected to such harsh policies, especially if student handbooks and code of conduct are the governing law in schools. These harsh policies have negative effects on child development, willingness to participate in school, and student dropout rate. The wellbeing and learning progress of a child should be the most important aspect in the education system.

As an educator and researcher, I take responsibility for how a student might be set up for success in the academic setting. Classroom management, especially during the pandemic, can be difficult for teachers to master as well as for students to positively respond to. In my student teaching experiences, I have witnessed firsthand students not following behavior expectations and the consequences play out. When student handbooks do not clearly define behavior expectations and the associated consequences, even seasoned teachers are confused about what to do with students.

For my Honors Thesis, I wanted to understand the policies student handbooks in Maine included, to what detail were these policies explained in language that was easy to comprehend, and how might these policies affect young children in the academic setting. This topic has little to no research conducted, and I wanted to see if I could create a ripple
effect for further research to be conducted on student handbooks and how policies included in these handbooks might affect children. My goal is to create a conversation amongst educators, administrators, and ordinary people to analyze, question, and comprehend the governing policies set in place for young children to follow in the academic setting.
LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand how schools put discipline policies in place, and the effects of these policies, the researcher focused their literature review on zero-tolerance policies, discipline and equity, the effects on school climate, the reasons for expulsion in early childhood classrooms, and how school policies came to be. Although surprising, it is fairly common for young children to be suspended or expelled from either preschool or kindergarten. Approximately 8,700 3-year-old and 4-year-old children were expelled from state-funded preschool programs or pre-kindergarten classrooms in the United States in 2016 (Stegelin, 2020). Further research by Gilliam (2006) has shown that:

A Web search yielded stories describing 33 kindergartners expelled from Philadelphia public schools in 1 year, 5 kindergartners expelled from Cincinnati schools a 2-year-old toddler (along with his 5-month-old sister) being expelled from a North Carolina child care program after he bit another toddler, statewide efforts to address the problem of preschool and child care expulsion in Michigan and Connecticut, and a new effort by Family Communications, the Pittsburgh-based group that produced *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*, to help teachers address behavioral problems in preschool and reduce the likelihood of expulsion. (p. 228)

**Zero Tolerance Policy**

According to the American Psychology Association, zero tolerance policies can be defined as a “philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (Curran, 2017, 11). Zero tolerance policies grew out of federal drug policies enacted in the 1980s, where zero tolerance was intended as a method of severe consequence to send a message that certain behaviors would not be tolerated in the United States (Skiba, 2016).
Starting in the late 1980s, the fear of increased violence in schools led districts and administration to promote zero tolerance policies. These new school policies called for the removal of gun violence and all weapons, drugs, and all gang-related activity on school grounds. These policies also called for mandated suspension and expulsion of students for less serious offenses such as disruption, smoking, and dress code related violations (Skiba, 2016). The rise in zero tolerance policies resulted in the increased usage of security personnel [e.g. police officers] and security technology [e.g. security cameras, metal detectors].

In 1994, the federal government mandated the use of zero tolerance policies in schools across the United States when president Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act into law, which required a one year calendar expulsion for possession of firearms on school campuses (Skiba, 2016).

**Discipline Policies and Equity**

**Discipline and Race**

Zero-tolerance policies and other disciplinary actions implemented in schools disproportionately affects students of color, particularly black/African American students. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, African American students were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than white students (Green, 2015). These disproportionalities in suspension rates were seen as early as preschool. According to data released in 2014 by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment in the United States, yet 48% of all black preschool children received at least one out-of-school suspension (Department of Education, 2014). In comparison to white preschool students,
which make up 43% of preschool enrollment, 26% of all white preschool students received at least one out-of-school suspension (Department of Education, 2014).

For example, the suspension rate in Connecticut during the 1999-2000 school year was 7.37 kindergarteners per 1,000 enrollees, with the demographics of the suspended students 52% being African American and 35% being Latinx (Gilliam, 2006). About 77% of those 331 suspended kindergarten students lived in Connecticut’s most impoverished communities (Gilliam, 2006).

**Discipline and Gender**

Further, zero-tolerance policies also negatively impact students based on their gender. Preschool aged boys are also more likely to be suspended compared to girls, where boys represent 79% of all preschool aged children suspended once and 82% of all preschool aged children suspended multiple times, although boys represent 54% of all preschool enrollment (Department of Education, 2014).

Data has been collected and released about each state’s out-of-school suspension rates by gender and race/ethnicity. For boys in the state of Maine, 10% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 4% of Asian students, 3% of Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students, 15% of black/African American students, 11% of Hispanic/Latinx students, 9% of biracial students, and 6% of white students were given an out of school suspension in the 2011-2012 academic year (Department of Education, 2014).

For girls in the state of Maine, 5% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 1% of Asian students, 2% of Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students, 5% of black/African American students, 6% of Hispanic/Latinx students, 5% of biracial students, and 2% of white students were given an out of school suspension in the 2011-
2012 academic year (Department of Education, 2014). According to the U.S. 2019 Census the population of Maine is 0.7% American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.3% Asian, less than 0.5% Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, 1.7% black/African American, 1.8% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.8% biracial, and 94.4% white (Department of Commerce, 2019).

**Discipline and Poverty**

Children from low-income families, which public-funded programs target to receive services, are at a higher risk of being suspended or expelled from preschool. A meta-analysis of thirty studies from 1991 to 2002 indicated a correlation between family income level and risk for behavioral problems, as family income level decreases the risk of behavioral problems increases (Gilliam, 2006).

**School Climate and Discipline Policies**

Studies have shown that discipline policies can have a negative effect on school climate. The average length of time a student is suspended for is 3.5 days, and many students are suspended more than once. 3.5 million children in the public school system in the United States have lost 18 million days of instruction in one academic calendar year due to exclusionary suspensions or expulsions (Skiba, 2016).

Although zero-tolerance policies were established to ensure school safety, many zero tolerance policies are utilized for minor behaviors. School districts have become over reliant on zero tolerance policies, which lead to exclusionary suspensions or expulsions for students (Brooks, 2019). A student’s history of suspension is a predicting factor for future suspensions, rather than decreasing the likelihood for being suspended (Skiba, 2016). These practices for minor, non-violent infractures can negatively affect student academic achievement and mental health (Brooks, 2019).
In addition, harsh discipline policies increase the likelihood of a student’s involvement in the juvenile criminal justice system as well as not completing high school (Brooks, 2019). Both the affected individuals and the entire school community are negatively impacted by harsh discipline policies.

Reducing these harsh policies can lead to a positive school climate. Discipline policies are one of the many factors that impact school culture and climate for the entire school community (Brooks, 2019). A positive school climate is vital to student development, achievement, and mental health. Research from John Hopkins School of Education has indicated that implementing alternative, restorative discipline policies can positively impact school culture and climate for the entire school community (Brooks, 2019).

Some practices that foster a positive school climate include positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), social and emotional learning (SEL), trauma-informed practices (Brooks, 2019), and changing disciplinary codes of conduct (Skiba, 2016). Changing disciplinary policies at the district level can be a key first step in improving school climate and effectively developing a positive school climate (Skiba, 2016). An example of changes implemented at the district level includes limiting suspensions for students in early grades, with expectations in extreme circumstances (Anderson, 2020).

**Reasons for Expulsion in Early Childhood Classrooms**

Despite public information regarding the suspension or expulsion of young children, there is little to no peer-reviewed scientific literature on why young children are being suspended or expelled from school. Only a few empirical studies have been conducted regarding the suspension or expulsion of students in any grade level, and
researchers have largely ignored the effects of suspensions or expulsion on young children.

There are several reasons why a young child might be suspended or expelled from an early childhood education program. For example, challenging behaviors in preschool aged children may exclude them from participating in early childhood education programs (Gilliam, 2006). In Connecticut, during the 1999-2000 school year, 331 kindergarteners were suspended from school for both minor and severe infractions, from behavior disruptions to violent behavior (Gilliam, 2006). 92% of the suspensions were out-of-school suspensions where the child was not permitted to attend school for up to 10 consecutive school days, with the remaining 8% of the suspensions were in-school suspensions (Gilliam, 2006). Out of the 331 suspensions, about 47% of the suspensions were the result of violent behavior, such as biting, hitting, kicking or throwing objects (Gilliam, 2006). During that same 1999-2000 school year, there were 42,193 kindergarteners enrolled. Approximately 8% of children ages three to five demonstrate behavioral problems severe enough to be diagnosed (Gilliam, 2006). Behavioral problems that appear in preschool have been associated with further behavioral problems and poor social skills in kindergarten.

Data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care has also indicated that the number of hours a child spends in non-parental care prior to kindergarten is related to behavioral problems. The more hours a child spends in non-parental care, such as public funded preschool programs, there is an increased risk of aggressive, assertive, and defiant behavior (Gilliam, 2006). Gilliam (2006) has provided data from several states regarding rates and reasons why teachers suspend or expel young children from preschool or kindergarten programs.
Massachusetts also experienced high suspensions and expulsion rates during the 1999-2000 school year. The expulsion rate during the 1999-2000 school year in the United States was 2.09 expulsions per 1,000 enrolled K-12 students (Gilliam, 2006). Massachusetts had an expulsion rate of 0.8 per 1,000 enrolled K-12 students, which was well below the national average. The range of suspension rates in the United States was 0.0 per 1,000 enrolled K-12 students in Hawaii to 7.93 per 1,000 enrolled K-12 students in Indiana (Gilliam, 2006). However, the expulsion rate of preschoolers in Massachusetts was 27.42 per 1,000 enrolled students, which “...was more than 34 times the rate for K-12 students in Massachusetts' public schools, more than 13 times the national K-12 rate, and nearly 3½ times the rate for the state with the highest K-12 expulsion rate” (Gilliam, 2006, 233). The preschool suspension rate in Massachusetts was 12.38 per 1,000 enrolled students suspended during the 1999-2000 school year (Gilliam, 2006). The preschool suspension rate in Massachusetts was less than ¼ of the K-12 suspension rate in Massachusetts, 54.68 per 1,000 enrolled students, and less than ⅕ of the national K-12 suspension rate, 67.05 per 1,000 enrolled students (Gilliam, 2006).

Impacts of Suspension or Expulsion on Young Children

The suspension or expulsion of young students has both long term and short term negative impacts on the child. The criteria for enrollment in most public-funded preschool programs include low-income, a child having a single parent, parental distress, the child having developmental delays, immigrant status, and other familial stressors (Stegelin, 2020). These young children might be coming into these preschool programs with additional trauma as well as strain on parents, and the suspension or expulsion of these young children might cause more trauma. Early childhood is critical for a child’s
development of a foundation for learning and want is needed inside and outside of the academic setting.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, preschool suspension and expulsion can be harmful to the child’s microsystem (Stegelin, 2020). The microsystem of an individual’s life includes their family, friends, school, and community. Preschool suspension and expulsion impact not only the child but also their family and community. The impact of early childhood suspension or expulsion has immediate and long term effects, such as emotional development, social development, and the potential of dropping out in the future (Stegelin, 2020). According to Stegelin (2020, 14), “Young students who are suspended or expelled are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those preschoolers who do not experience suspension or expulsion”. Suspension or expulsion can add additional trauma to students who may or may not already have preexisting trauma.

School Policies and How They Happen

There are several different types of policies and procedures within school districts and individual schools. The most general policies and procedures are those that are written and voted on by the school board. These common school board policies consist of a brief statement of requirement, such as legislature mandates, and a few brief details of how to enact the specific policy (Green, 2015). Based on these general policies, school districts may write longer and more detailed regulations that provide more information to administrators, teachers, and other school personnel about the goals set by the school board. School administrators also develop school-level procedures that reinforce district
policies and provide further information about daily practices within each school in the district.

School student/parent handbooks are established to communicate these policies and procedures in appropriate language to teachers, parents, and students (Green, 2015). In many of these student handbooks, there are sections regarding behavior expectations and the disciplinary actions that will be taken when a child does not meet behavior expectations. Some school districts have strict behavior regulations, where nonviolent behaviors may warrant harsh disciplinary actions. Other school districts have less structured policies and procedures that focus on teachers using classroom management strategies like conflict resolution (Camacho, 2020).

In 2008, Fenning et al. conducted an analysis of student handbooks in the United States utilizing the Analysis of Discipline Codes Rating Form–Revised (ADCR-R). The ADCR-R is a coding sheet that was developed in prior content analysis work for the Illinois discipline policies. The form was revised and modified in 2008 to include nonviolent and less severe infractions found in discipline policies and procedures (Fenning, 2012). The analysis found that suspension and expulsion were the most common form of disciplinary action described by the student handbooks or student codes of conduct across all areas of infractions from mild to severe infractions (Camacho, 2020). It was discovered that mild infractions, such as truancy and class disruptions, often utilized suspension as possible punishment, 64% and 67% respectfully. However, for more moderate infractions, such as bullying, suspension was a possible punishment 47% of the time (Camacho, 2020). Suspension as a form of punishment for severe infractions, such as violent behavior like fighting, was present in 78% of all student handbooks.
Suspension as a form of punishment for delinquent behavior, such as drug use, was present in 90% of all student handbooks (Camacho, 2020).

**Maine Specific Information Regarding School Discipline Policies**

The Education Commission of the States compiled data regarding school discipline policies in all 50 states in the United States. There were nine questions addressing suspension or expulsion discipline policies. These questions can be found under Appendix 1. All of the following information is specific for the state of Maine. In the state of Maine, a student may be suspended or expelled for bullying, making a false accusation, membership in fraternity, sorority or secret organization, and violation of school rules (Kelley, 2021).

In addition, in the state of Maine, a student must be suspended or expelled for controlled substance possession/sale/use, defiant or disruptive behavior, firearm/weapon possession/use on school grounds, physical harm, and threat of physical harm (Kelley, 2021). In the state of Maine, law enforcement is required to come to school grounds when infractions occur regarding firearm/weapon possession (Kelley, 2021).

Maine has specific limitations in place for the use of suspension or expulsion. The limitation is for length of time of the suspension or expulsion, where the suspension may not exceed 10 days and expulsions may not exceed the number of instructional days in the school calendar year (Kelley, 2021). In order to keep track of students who are suspended or expelled and schools who are using suspensions and expulsions, the state of Maine has outlined reporting requirements. The superintendent of each school district annually reports data on the number of students who are expelled from school and the number of students who are readmitted to school after expulsion to the commissioner's consultant on truancy (Kelley, 2021). However, the state of Maine has no specific
information regarding the statute or regulation of reporting the suspension or expulsion of students by race, ethnicity, gender, or grade level (Kelley, 2021).

Besides suspension or expulsion, Maine also has non-punitive approaches to disciplinary action. The school boards in Maine must consider disciplinary actions that focus on positive and restorative interventions and evidence based practices. School boards should avoid zero tolerance policies (Kelley, 2021).

Further, Maine includes some alternative school options for students who are either suspended or expelled. The school board may provide students with educational services in an alternative setting. The data does not provide specific information regarding what these alternative settings might look like (Kelley, 2021). Interestingly, Maine has no specific information regarding the statute or regulation of corporal punishment or when to use by specific age group (Kelley, 2021).
METHODOLOGY

The present document analysis examined behavior expectations and disciplinary action policies of public preschools in Maine. The document analysis sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the behavior expectations for preschoolers included in school-wide discipline policies in Maine?
2. What are the disciplinary actions outlined for preschoolers in school-wide discipline policies in Maine?

Teachers, administrators, and families need to be able to interpret and comprehend behavior expectations and disciplinary actions in order for all students to learn safely in the academic environment. In order for students to demonstrate behavioral expectations with the aim of not receiving disciplinary action, student handbooks need to include certain benchmarks of clarity.

The researcher began collecting data on public preschools in the state of Maine by contacting Janet Fairman, a contributor of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI), “…which provides policymakers with objective data, policy research and evaluation to define and assess educational needs, services and impacts” (Maine Education Policy Research Institute, 2019). A MEPRI report published in February 2020 included a list of state funded public preschools which were categorized based on geographic location defined by the sixteen counties in Maine. Fairman further directed the researcher to contact Patricia Lech, who did most of the data analysis for the February 2020 MERPI report. The student data collected for the February 2020 MERPI report came from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) which was then reported to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Statistics (NCES). The researcher utilized data...
gathered by the MDOE, from student enrollment data collected annually in October. The researcher utilized data published in a data set called Student Funded Attending Counts by Grade School and District (Maine Department of Education, 2019). The raw data identified attending school count by grade, school year, grade, school and school administrative unit (SAU ID), attending school name, and attending school ID, see Appendix 2. The researcher identified all of the school districts that listed preschool/PK as part of the research data.

Since the data from the report was collected in early 2021, the researcher confirmed each school had a current, operating preschool program for the 2021-22 school year. The data set provided by Student Funded Attending Counts by Grade School and District consisted of 119 public school based preschool/PK programs. Schools were eliminated from the data set if the preschool program was closed or if a school did not have a preschool program. The researcher cross referenced this information by looking at each school’s online homepage and checking to see if there was a preschool program.

The original set of data included 119 public funded preschools in the state of Maine. The researcher organized the data in an excel spreadsheet and included attending school count, the year the data was collected, grade level, SAU ID, attending school ID, attending school name, county, and region. Each piece was color coded and a key was created in order to organize the data. Each public school based preschool/PK program was color coded by whether or not it was a public-funded program, by county, and by region. See Appendix 3.

The researcher went back to each school’s online homepage to search for the student and/or parent handbook in hopes to find the school’s policies for behavioral
expectations and subsequent disciplinary action. In the excel spreadsheet, the research indicated if the student handbook was or was not obtained for each elementary school.

Out of the original 119 public funded preschools in the state of Maine, the researcher has access to 72 student handbooks. The schools that did not provide an online version of the student handbook or the research did not have access to were eliminated from the data set. The researcher created a new excel spreadsheet with the 72 schools that had student handbooks. The second spreadsheet was organized by SAU ID, attending SAU name, attending school ID, and several key terms the researcher used as indicators of how clear the handbook was in communicating behavior expectations, disciplinary action, and suspension/expulsion policies.

A content analysis was conducted of the data, where the researcher quantified the number of times specific words or phrases were utilized in each of the student handbooks. The researcher chose these key terms in order to quantify the frequency of words used in these handbooks, and whether or not these key terms provided adequate information regarding the behavior expectations and disciplinary actions of preschool aged children. These key terms include: expectations, code of conduct, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Physical Restraint and Seclusion - Policy JKAA, disciplinary action, suspension, and expulsion. The researcher indicated whether or not each student handbook had these terms. Green meant the student handbook utilizes these terms, and red meant the student handbook did not utilize these terms. See Appendix 4.

The researcher chose to utilize document analysis as the framework for qualitative research. Document analysis is a social research method that collects data from documents in order for a researcher to interpret, give voice, and provide meaning to an
assessment topic (Triad 3, 2016). Document analysis can be divided into two different writing techniques in order to collect, interpret, and analyze data. The researcher chose the writing technique called content analysis to collect, interpret, and analyze the student handbooks. A content analysis was conducted of the data, where the researcher quantified the number of times specific words or phrases were utilized in each of the student handbooks.
ANALYSIS

The researcher collected and interpreted the data using content analysis technique to the number of times specific words or phrases were utilized in each of the 72 student handbooks. The researcher chose key terms in order to quantify the frequency of words used in these handbooks, and whether or not these key terms provided adequate information regarding the behavior expectations and disciplinary actions of preschool aged children. These key terms include: behavior expectations, code of conduct, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Physical Restraint and Seclusion - Policy JKAA, disciplinary action, suspension, and expulsion. The researcher indicated whether or not each student handbook had these terms. Green meant the student handbook utilizes these terms, and red meant the student handbook did not utilize these terms.

Behavior expectations and disciplinary policies were analyzed to demonstrate how detailed or vague student handbooks are in communicating their policies to students, parents, and teachers. The importance of language, the amount or lack of information provided, and whether or not resources were provided for students, parents, and teachers. Based on the content analysis of the handbooks, the researchers determined which student handbooks were detailed or vague based on their knowledge of child development, instructional strategies, and classroom management strategies from studying Child Development and Family Relations major with a concentration in Early Childhood Education at the University of Maine.

The researcher collected data from 72 student handbooks all from Maine public preschool programs. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 64 handbooks (89%) mentioned behavior expectations, 34 handbooks (47%) mentioned a code of conduct, 29 handbooks (40%) mentioned the Positive Behavioral Interventions and
Supports (PBIS) framework, 16 handbooks (22%) mentioned Physical Restraint and Seclusion - Policy JKAA, 64 handbooks (89%) mentioned disciplinary action, 50 handbooks (69%) mentioned suspension and, 29 handbooks (40%) mentioned expulsion.

The researcher also collected data if handbooks included one chosen term rather than another, included none of the chosen terms, or included all of the chosen terms. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 2 out of 72, or approximately 0.02%, mentioned behavior expectations but did not mention disciplinary action. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 3 out of the 72, or approximately 0.04%, mentioned disciplinary action but did not mention behavior expectations. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 3 out of the 72, or approximately 0.04%, mentioned suspension but did not mention behavior expectations. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 4 out of the 72, or approximately 0.06%, did not mention any of the chosen terms for the content analysis. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 1 out of the 72, or approximately 0.01%, mentioned all of the chosen terms for the content analysis.

The researcher determined that a handbook that is detailed and clearly labels behavior expectations and disciplinary actions. Minor and major infractions are clearly defined and what corresponding consequences are associated with each infraction violation. The language utilized in detailed handbooks is easy to understand. These handbooks are written in simple language, not ‘teacher talk’, and effectively provide information regarding expectations and consequences for students, teachers, parents, and administrators. In order to provide enough information regarding behavior expectations and disciplinary actions, detailed handbooks might provide resources for students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Some informational and beneficial resources in detailed student handbooks include but are not limited to behavior matrices, referral
forms, feedback forms, philosophy of discipline, PBIS support contact information, and consequences table.

A detailed handbook includes specific details regarding behavior expectations, behavior management, and open communication between administrators/teachers and parents. For example, the Solon Elementary School student handbook, located in Solon, ME, provides these key details in order to effectively communicate what occurs in the school to parents/guardians. The handbook clearly defines what the PBIS framework is, the school-wide expectations for student behavior, and some major components of the PBIS framework. All of this information is clearly labeled and defined on page 5 of the handbook, See Appendix 5. The Solon Elementary School handbook also has a section on communication between the parent/guardian and administration/classroom teachers. The handbook includes the communication chain in the district and emphasizes to contact the classroom teacher first regarding concerns at school. The handbook also has a section on student behavior and the district’s philosophy of discipline, See Appendix 6. Again, communication between parents and the school is emphasized by encouraging parents to contact administration regarding their thoughts and concerns about school discipline and behavior.

A detailed handbook includes specific and clear guidelines regarding discipline, such as including behavior matrices, definitions of minor and major infractions, specific disciplinary action for minor and major infractions, and provides referral forms for teachers. For example, Asa C. Adams Elementary School, located in Orono, ME, has an entire section in the handbook dedicated to student conduct and discipline. The student handbook clearly defines what a minor and major/serious infraction is in easy to digest language, See Appendix 7. The handbook provides tables regarding what an infraction is
and specific disciplinary action associated with specific infractions. There is also a
section on how to encourage positive, expected behaviors in the academic environment
for students. The language that is used throughout the handbook does not include
unnecessary language or terms and clearly conveys the message of behavior expectations
and discipline.

Vague student handbooks do not clearly state or lack behavior expectations and/or
disciplinary action. Vague handbooks do not provide enough information; therefore, the
policies might be up for interpretation such as disciplinary action is not unified across the
school but up to individual teachers. Vague handbooks utilize hostile or unfriendly
language to describe behavior expectations, disciplinary action, or philosophy of
discipline. Vague handbooks lack important information and resources for students to be
successful in the academic setting.

The researcher determined that vague handbooks lack sufficient details in order to
provide teachers, students, administrators, and parents with the knowledge and
understanding of behavior expectations and disciplinary action in the academic setting.
These handbooks do not provide enough information about what a minor/major infraction
is, what specific consequences are associated with specific infractions, or do not have a
school-wide detailed plan about behavior expectations or disciplinary action. The
research discovered that certain handbooks would use phrasing such as “‘disciplinary
action up to and including expulsion’” (Phippsburg Elementary School student
handbook) to describe consequences for infractions. However, there is no information
provided about what leads up to expulsion or provides those specific consequences.
Phrases such as the one provided from the Phippsburg Elementary School student
handbook are too vague for anyone to interpret in order to provide age appropriate consequences for breaking behavior expectations.

Clearly detailed school-wide behavior expectations and disciplinary actions leave little gray area or room for individual interpretation. When the expectations and consequences are not the same from classroom to classroom, it might confuse students and parents. Some vague handbooks state: “Teachers and staff members will have the authority to make and enforce, with suitable consequences, all rules necessary for the proper management of classrooms and to foster appropriate student behavior, subject to approval of the principal” (Glenburn Elementary School student handbook). When there is no continuity across the school regarding discipline, there is no consistency for students in order for them to be successful in the academic setting. Students might be set up for failure when expectations and consequences are not consistent because they are unable to regulate their behavior for individual expectations and consequences.
CONCLUSIONS

The researcher decided to conduct a document analysis on student handbooks of public preschool programs in the state of Maine in order to determine what behavior expectations and disciplinary policies are for preschool aged students and how these handbooks present these policies. Most research conducted on zero tolerance policies, suspension policies, and expulsion policies focused on high school aged students. However, it is fairly common for young children to be suspended or expelled from either preschool or kindergarten. Approximately 8,700 3-year-old and 4-year-old children were expelled from state-funded preschool programs or pre-kindergarten classrooms in the United States in 2016 (Stegelin, 2020). The researcher was compelled to analyze how these policies might affect young children in Maine, since the researcher studies Child Development and Family Relations with a concentration in Early Childhood Education at the University of Maine.

The research collected data on the student handbooks of public preschools in Maine to answer the following questions:

1. What are the behavior expectations for preschoolers included in school-wide discipline policies in Maine?
2. What are the disciplinary actions outlined for preschoolers in school-wide discipline policies in Maine?

Based on the data collected from the document analysis of 72 student handbooks from public funded preschools in the state of Maine, behavior expectations in student handbooks vary drastically from school to school and district to district. There is no universal document that describes what the behavior expectations are for preschool age students in the state of Maine. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed through the
technique of content analysis, 64 (89%) mentioned behavior expectations. The most common behavior expectations listed in the student handbooks collected are to be safe, be respectful, and be responsible. The format that behavior expectations are presented in these student handbooks vary as well. These behavior expectations are structured as behavior matrices, a bulleted list, or in a paragraph form. The detail to which behavior expectations were explained in student handbooks varied greatly from extremely vague to highly detailed. An example of a detailed explanation of behavior expectations is from Libby-Tozier School, where the handbook lists and defines three behavior expectations on school grounds, see Appendix 8. The student handbook defines what the expectation is and lists some ways that students need to model those behavior expectations. An example of a vague explanation of behavior expectations is from East End Community School. East End Community School’s behavior expectations are formatted in a paragraph form, stating: “At EECS, students are expected to follow classroom and school rules. While there may be specific rules and procedures with individual classes, lunch, recess and transitions; across all settings, the expectations are based on respect, responsibility and safety” (East End Community School student handbook). Although the expectations are defined, the handbook does not include ways students are supposed to model those behavior expectations. Information regarding behavior needs to be clear in order for students to correctly follow them.

Based on the data collected from the document analysis of 72 student handbooks from public funded preschools in the state of Maine, disciplinary action in student handbooks vary from school to school and district to district. Again, here is no universal document that states what logical, age-appropriate consequences are for preschool aged children. Some student handbooks mentioned disciplinary action for specific grade levels.
For example, Ridge View Community School and Brewer Community School have specific discipline for students in grades preschool through fourth grade. At Ridge View Community School, students were not suspended from school unless they were in grades five through eight. However, there are some schools that use the same handbook for the entire district, so high school and preschool aged students have the same consequences. For example, Minot Consolidated School utilizes a district-wide student handbook, See Appendix 9. Although it is beneficial to have consistency regarding disciplinary action from grade to grade, logical and age appropriate consequences are the same for a preschool aged and a high school aged student.

Some student handbooks describe in detail what a minor or major infraction was and what consequence was associated with specific infractions. For example, Asa C Adams School, Athens Community School, and North Elementary School define what a minor or major infraction is when students are not following behavior expectations and specifically define what consequence was associated with specific infractions, See Appendix 7. Other student handbooks, such as ones from H B Emery Jr Memorial School, are vague and lack concrete information defining logical consequences for violating behavior expectations. The wide range of disciplinary actions for preschool students demonstrates to the researcher that school boards and other individuals involved in policy making lack sufficient information regarding child development in young children.

The researcher discovered other useful information regarding which student handbooks do or do not include behavior expectations, disciplinary actions, or either policies. Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 3 out of the 72, or approximately 0.04%, mentioned disciplinary action but did not mention behavior
expectations. These 3 student handbooks from Lincoln county, Sagadahoc county, and Penobscot county did not mention behavior expectations in their respective student handbooks yet mentioned consequences for not following behavior expectations. Students need to be explicitly told the behavior expectations in the academic setting in order for them to behave appropriately and learn. It is difficult to comprehend how consequences are administered in schools where behavior expectations are not stated, explained, or listed anywhere in the handbook for students and parents to understand.

Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 2 (0.02%) mentioned behavior expectations but did not mention disciplinary action. These student handbooks were from schools in Lincoln county, Sagadahoc county, and Penobscot county. When behavior expectations are clearly defined to students, they understand what is expected of them in the academic setting. However, there are going to be students who do not meet or follow behavior expectations. Logical, age-appropriate consequences are necessary for students to be able to function and learn at school.

Out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed, 1 (0.01%) mentioned suspension but did not mention behavior expectations. The handbook that only included information regarding suspension policies was from Aroostook county. Previously conducted literature has demonstrated the negative affects suspension has on preschool students. The impact of early childhood suspension or expulsion has immediate and long term effects, such as emotional development, social development, and the potential of dropping out in the future (Stegelin, 2020). According to Stegelin (2020, 14), “Young students who are suspended or expelled are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school
attitudes, and face incarceration than those preschoolers who do not experience suspension or expulsion”.

Based on the data collected regarding the behavior expectations and disciplinary action in student handbooks, the researcher discovered how some handbooks might negatively affect school climate. Previous literature from Brooks (2019) mentioned that harsh discipline policies increase the likelihood of a student’s involvement in the juvenile criminal justice system as well as not completing high school. Both the student and the school community can be negatively affected by harsh discipline policies. Harsh policies can include but are not limited to zero tolerance policies. The wording of these policies in student handbooks might be interpreted as harsh based on specific words or phrases to include. When collecting data on student handbooks regarding the school’s policies on behavior expectations and disciplinary action, the research determined that Dawn F Barnes Elementary School in Caswell, ME had harsh wording in their student handbook. The introduction of behavior expectations and disciplinary action stated:

All students must assume responsibility for their own conduct, and will be held accountable for his/her behavior. The faculty expects every student to conduct him or herself in a satisfactory manner and in such a way that their behavior will bring credit upon themselves, their parents, school, and community. From time to time, it will be necessary to take strong disciplinary action for situations that arise out of unsatisfactory student conduct. This action may take many forms and can range from a simple conference to a suspension from school. Most cases of this nature can be resolved through the conference process. However, when continuous and serious situations occur, stronger action may be in order (Dawn F Barnes Elementary School student handbook). The researcher did not understand what “satisfactory manner” means in regard to school wide behavior expectations. The student handbook does not describe what satisfactory means, nor does it include examples of “satisfactory manner”. Terms such as satisfactory and unsatisfactory are subjective and are up to the discretion of what satisfactory/unsatisfactory means in each household, classroom, and academic setting.
Interestingly, out of the 72 total student handbooks analyzed 29 (40%) mentioned the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework. According to the Center on PBIS (2022), “PBIS improves social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups”. Reducing harsh policies, such as student handbooks that mentioned disciplinary action but did not mention behavior expectations, can create a more positive environment for young students to learn how to behave in the academic setting. Research from John Hopkins School of Education has indicated that implementing alternative, restorative discipline policies can positively impact school culture and climate for the entire school community (Brooks, 2019). Some practices that foster a positive school climate include positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), social and emotional learning (SEL), trauma-informed practices (Brooks, 2019), and changing disciplinary codes of conduct (Skiba, 2016). The PBIS framework is not the only way to structure logical and age appropriate behavior expectations and disciplinary action in preschools. However, the PBIS framework does provide effective resources to create a positive school climate for young children to learn behavior expectations with associated logical consequences for those expectations.

Many of the student handbooks the research utilized in the document analysis, using a content analysis framework, were not for the specific 2021-2022 academic year. All of the student handbooks were pulled from each school’s individual website, where parents/guardians would also look for access to their child’s student handbook. The overall lack of research regarding how the policies in student handbooks affect students in the academic setting might be a reason why student handbooks are not updated yearly. Based on the data collected by the researcher, there is a large range of content and
policies within student handbooks. Although differentiation is important in the education setting, it might be beneficial for districts, SAUs, or counties to have similar student handbooks. The continuity of behavior expectations and disciplinary policies might be beneficial for students in order to succeed in the academic setting. More research should be conducted in order to find the behavior expectations, disciplinary actions, and overall framework that is the most effective for the majority of students in order to succeed in the academic environment.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher has several recommendations after collecting and analyzing the 72 student handbooks collected from public preschools in the State of Maine. It is essential that student handbooks provide enough information and detail in order to clearly state behavior expectations and disciplinary action for teachers, administrators, parents, and students to have the same interpretation of policies. Minor and major behavior infractions need to be clearly defined and have corresponding age appropriate consequences. There needs to be clear communication between teachers, administrators, and parents or guardians regarding potential behavior plans and expectations in order for students to be successful in the academic environment. Student handbooks should be effective tools for teachers, administrators, parents, and students that are frequently utilized.

The clarity and purpose of the language used in student handbooks needs to effectively convey essential information regarding the school or district to parents or guardians and students. Student handbooks can be viewed as the bridge between administrators to parents/guardians and students. ‘Teacher jargon’ and the language used in the educational settings can be confusing and unfamiliar to parents/guardians as well as students of all ages. Student handbooks should be free of ‘teacher jargon’ in order to clearly communicate behavioral expectations and disciplinary actions. If teacher jargon needs to be included in the student handbook, a detailed explanation of the term should be provided. Such terms that the research would recommend be defined for parents/guardians include but are not limited to Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, social emotional learning (SEL), minor infraction, major infraction, and behavior matrix.
Student handbooks need to clearly identify and define the series of consequences a student could potentially encounter if the student is not following behavior expectations. Student handbooks should refrain from using language like and similar to "disciplinary action up to and including expulsion" (Phippsburg Elementary School student handbook). The language provided by the Phippsburg Elementary School student handbook and from handbooks in other schools does not clearly identify and define all potential consequences for not following behavior expectations. The language is confusing for the researcher to fully grasp, so individuals with little to no experience in education would have drastically different interpretations of ‘up to and including’. It would be helpful to all parties involved to clearly identify and define consequences for minor and major behavior infractions in student handbooks in order to eliminate confusion and multiple interpretations.

The researcher found no data from previous literature reviews regarding parents/guardians’ involvement in the decision-making process for student handbooks. Only one handbook from the 72 collected for the document analysis implemented a section where parents/guardians were encouraged to communicate with administration regarding the content of the student handbook. When administration and parents/guardians have positive interactions, it is likely that a positive relationship will occur. Parents/guardians would not be intimidated by specific policies within their child’s student handbooks if administration provided a space for parents/guardians to communicate their questions and concerns. The researcher recommends that school boards and administrators take the parents/guardians of the school/district into consideration when discussing policies in student handbooks. Input from members of the community whose children are directly impacted by the behavior expectations,
disciplinary actions, and other policies set in place by the student handbook would be beneficial for school districts. Further research should be conducted to see what parents/guardians’ opinions are on student handbooks. The potential data collected from surveys and other forms of data collection would be beneficial for administration in order to tailor policies that best fit the needs of the students. Student handbooks should be beneficial to all members of the school community and everyone should understand the content inside the student handbook.

For behavior expectations and disciplinary action, the researcher has concluded that a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework best conveys these policies in student handbooks. PBIS frameworks appear in student handbooks through behavior matrices, tables of the sequence of consequences, as well as the potential use of token systems. For behavior expectations, the PBIS framework clearly states what behavior expectations are in certain areas of the school, such as the classroom, playground, hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms, and buses. When expectations are school wide, it makes it easier for students to comprehend how they are supposed to behave no matter where they are in the building. Behavior matrices are beneficial for teachers because the students are already coming into the classroom already understanding how they are supposed to behave at school. When consequences are clearly defined and correlate with a specific infraction, the discipline process comes clear. If teachers or administrators have to fill out a behavior form on a student, the teacher clearly understands what the consequence will be for that specific infraction. The students will also know specifically what the consequence will be when they are not following school wide behavior expectations. Tables of the sequence of consequences leave no gray area for discipline, which is beneficial for the overall school climate for students, parents,
teachers, and administrators. Token systems are utilized in a PBIS framework to positively reinforce students who follow behavior expectations. Token systems can create an incentive for students to meet behavior expectations and make those positive behaviors automatic for students. Students must meet the minimum requirement of behavior expectations observed, whatever that number might be, in order to receive a reward. When these aspects of the PBIS framework were included in student handbooks, it demonstrated to the research that a priority of the administration is to create continuity regarding behavior expectations and disciplinary action in the academic setting for students. According to the Center on PBIS (2022), “PBIS improves social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups”.

The members of the school board who decide on and pass the policies within student handbooks need to understand the importance of child development and age appropriate behavior expectations and disciplinary actions. The thought process of a ten year old student is different from the thought process of a four year old student within the same elementary school. If a district chooses to have a student handbook that applies to all schools within the district, the behavior expectations and disciplinary actions are the same from preschool/pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school aged students. According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, preschool suspension and expulsion can be harmful to the child’s microsystem (Stegelin, 2020). The microsystem of an individual’s life includes their family, friends, school, and community. Preschool suspension and expulsion impact not only the child but also their family and community. The impact of early childhood suspension and expulsion has immediate and long term effects, such as emotional development, social development, and the potential
of dropping out in the future (Stegelin, 2020). According to Stegelin (2020, pg 14), “Young students who are suspended or expelled are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those preschoolers who do not experience suspension or expulsion”. Behavior expectations and disciplinary actions need to be age appropriate in order for young children to understand how to function in the academic environment and what the consequences might be for not following behavior expectations. Suspension or expulsion policies may not be effective or appropriate for a preschool aged student as a consequence for them not following behavior expectations. The researcher would recommend school board members understand child development, how trauma affects behavior, and age appropriate consequences in order to create policies that are beneficial for students, parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators.

The policies created for student handbooks are determined by school boards of each district or school within a district. School boards consist of five to ten members who are elected to their position on the school board. Members of school boards are ordinary individuals who care about their local community and schools (Sam, 2022). However, it might be more beneficial for members of school boards to have experience or education in child development, education, social work, psychology, or other in human services. Individuals who do not have experience or in education may approve of student handbooks whose policies do not benefit those individuals who the policies were written for. These ordinary individuals of the community may lack the knowledge of zero tolerance policies, PBIS framework, and other factors regarding behavior expectations and disciplinary action. Even though the school board collaborates with administrators, parents, teachers, and students, if effective strategies and frameworks are not already
established in the student handbook they would not even be considered to be included in the handbook. It is essential that school boards know that suspension and expulsion were the most common form of disciplinary action described by the student handbooks or student codes of conduct across all areas of infractions from mild to severe infractions (Camacho, 2020). In order to have detailed student handbooks that provide enough information for behavior expectations and age appropriate disciplinary actions, the members of the school board who create these handbooks need to have experience or education in those specific fields.

It is helpful for parents/guardians and teachers when student handbooks provide resources regarding behavior expectations, disciplinary procedures, and other topics such as social emotional learning. Behavior and discipline can be difficult for teachers to deal with, especially if the negative behavior is constant and recurring. Resources for teachers to receive support from individuals who specialize in PBIS training for example or other ideas on how to reinforce behavior expectations for students. These resources can come from individuals or organizations within the school or from a third party organization. These resources can also be beneficial for parents/guardians. If the parent/guardian is playing an active role in their child’s learning, then these resources can help encourage behavior expectations at home for students. If a student is struggling meeting behavioral expectations at school, it is likely that the behavior continues at home. Only a few student handbooks included resources to support teachers and parents/guardians regarding behavior expectations and disciplinary actions. Lisbon Community School included PBIS support for staff members, providing resources in order to make behavior expectations and disciplinary action understandable and effective.


50-State Comparisons

1. What may a student be suspended or expelled for?
2. What must a student be suspended or expelled for?
3. What limitations are placed on the use of suspension and/or expulsion?
4. Which nonpunitive approaches, if any, are outlined as alternatives to suspension and/or expulsion?
5. Which alternative schooling options, if any, are available for students who are suspended or expelled?
6. When is a school required to involve law enforcement on school grounds?
7. Is corporal punishment permitted?
8. Does the state outline reporting requirements for suspension and/or expulsion?
9. Does the state specify requirements to report discipline data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender or any other category?
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APPENDIX 5

INTRODUCING K-5 PBIS

WHAT IS PBIS?

The Positive Behavior interventions and supports program is based upon a philosophy of recognizing positive contributions of students. Our goal is to help each child develop self-discipline. The home and school share the responsibility for developing good citizens. Parent, teachers and students must work together to maintain a safe learning environment.

As a part of PBIS, teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff will have the responsibility to TEACH positive behavior expectations to students.

PBIS means students will know exactly what is expected of them. Students who take responsibility to behave positively will be recognized and rewarded in a variety of ways. Students will also know the consequences that will result when they choose NOT to meet the school wide expectations.

SCHOOL WIDE EXPECTATIONS

**BE SAFE** ~ * Keep hands, fee, and objects to self * Walk safely and quietly * Follow adult directions

**BE RESPECTFUL** ~ * Use kind words * Listen politely while others are speaking * Keep school areas neat and clean * Respect personal space * Obey school staff and bus drivers.

**BE RESPONSIBLE** ~ * Follow adult direction * Stay in designated area * Complete assignments and school work * Clean up after yourself * Come prepared with supplies and materials * Actively participate in class

Students will receive ongoing instruction from staff on our school-wide expectations in all areas of the school. These areas include classroom, bathroom, cafeteria, hallways, bus, computer lab, library, recess playground and at assemblies. By establishing clear expectations for each of these areas within our school, we will reduce the incidences of unacceptable student behaviors.

MAJOR COMPONENTS OF PBIS

* A school-wide common approach to discipline * Positively stated expectations for all students and staff * Procedures for teaching the expectations * Procedures for discouraging rule-violating behavior * Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the discipline system on a regular basis

This is a multi-year initiative and RSU # 74 is entering its second year of implementation. Please look for opportunities to be able to assist your school in the implementation process. Your voice is welcomed!

We use our PBIS program in conjunction with the RSU #74 Student Code of Conduct which ensures a safe, productive, and positive learning environment.
APPENDIX 6

COMMUNICATION

In most cases, the classroom teacher of your child can best answer question or address concerns that you may have regarding your child's education. Following is a list of individuals in the district that you may speak with about educational issues. When addressing classroom concerns, please always start with the classroom teacher!

COMMUNICATION CHAIN IN RSU # 74

- Classroom Teacher or Special Ed Teacher
- Building Principal
- Superintendent
- School Board

SCHOOL BEHAVIOR

In working towards a positive school culture, our discipline system will focus on clear and consistent rules for student behavior. To help students change their behavior, we use small, fair consequences when students break our school rules. The core of our school's strength is our ability to develop positive relationships with the students that walk through our halls daily. Our staff and students will treat each other with respect and dignity. When we deal with discipline we will remember that a student's misbehavior or refusal to do work is not about us. This focus will help us to discipline with a positive tone and without anger. Our staff is committed to making our school a place where all students feel welcome and safe to be. We welcome your thoughts and ideas about student behavior issues. The Principal, Head Teacher and Social Worker are available to you for any concerns you may have about your children. We are looking forward to a great year!
## Categories and Consequences for Interfering Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Infractions</th>
<th>Consequences for Minor Infractions could include:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Rough play/invading someone’s space</td>
<td>● Verbal reminders/warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Inappropriate language</td>
<td>● Removal from the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Disruptive/disrespectful behavior</td>
<td>● Loss of recess time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Breaking school or classroom rules</td>
<td>● Restitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lying</td>
<td>Staff will use natural or logical consequences whenever possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Non-compliance</td>
<td>When consequences are not effective, staff members will report the behavior to the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Teasing (Teasing under the minor infractions category is generally non-personal or good-natured in intent. It is not intended to be hurtful or malicious).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Serious Infractions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Aggression</th>
<th>Physical aggression in this category refers to fighting, or any physical behavior directed at another person that is intended to cause physical or emotional harm, or is used to intimidate the victim.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>Theft is considered a serious infraction when it involves classroom or personal items other than common classroom materials such as pencils or rulers. Minor thefts may be viewed as serious if the student demonstrates a repeated pattern of stealing behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td>Profanity refers to the intentional use of obscene language, particularly if it is directed at staff members or other students. Profanity in this category may also include a given student's repeated use of obscene language that was previously viewed as a minor infraction by staff members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying and Harassment</td>
<td>Bullying and harassment are physical, verbal, or relational/psychological behaviors that are intended to cause physical harm, fear of physical harm, and/or often involve an imbalance of power between individuals. Students who repeatedly tease, taunt, intimidate, name-call, threaten, isolate, or physically injure another student will be considered to be engaging in harassment or bullying. All staff members who witness or hear reports of these behaviors should immediately report these to the office.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Primary School Behavioral and Academic Standards

The following five standards define the behavior guidelines that we believe are necessary for a safe and healthy school environment. These standards apply from “door to door”—from the time the student leaves for school until they return home after school.

1. **Be Responsible:**
   
   Example:
   
   Students will be responsible for choices.
   Students will have all assignments and materials ready to begin the day.
   Students will be on time, prepared, and expect to succeed.
   Students will follow directions and expectations of the school and classroom.
   Students will display appropriate cafeteria manners, hallway, playground, and bus behavior.

2. **Be Respectful:**

   Example:
   
   Students will respect everyone’s right to teach and learn.
   Students will treat others as they would like to be treated.
   Students will use appropriate language at all times.
   Students will raise their hands so as not to interrupt the learning process.

3. **Be Safe:**

   Example:
   
   Students will keep hands, feet, and objects to themselves.
   Students will not touch others’ belongings.
   Students will not name call, tease, harass, push, or fight.
   Students will tell the truth.
   Students will not vandalize or destroy school property.
RSU 16 Student Handbook
2021–2022

Our mission is to prepare and support all students within a culture of excellence to do their best and to be their best, so that each can be a successful, contributing citizen, able to adapt to change and to successfully respond to the future.

Poland Regional High School
Whittier Middle School ♦ Minot Community School
Elm Street School ♦ Poland Community School
AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Kristin M. Davies was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts on February 22, 2000. She was raised in Groveland, Massachusetts and graduated from Pentucket. Regional High School in 2018. Majoring in Child Development and Family Relations with a concentration in Early Childhood Education, Kristin also has a minor in psychology. She is a member of Alpha Omicron Pi and Kappa Delta Pi honors society.

Upon graduation, Kristin plans to return home to Massachusetts to pursue her teaching career. She plans to teach in the Greater Boston area as an elementary school teacher.