Moving Away from Zero Tolerance Policies: Examination of Illinois Educator Preparedness in Addressing Student Behavior

Gerardo Moreno and Michael Scaletta

In August 2016, Illinois Senate Bill 100 (SB 100) restricted the use of zero tolerance disciplinary practices within public schools when addressing student behavior. In efforts to make school discipline less exclusionary and more effective, SB 100 mandated educators exhaust all means of interventions prior to suspending or expelling a student. Additionally, SB 100 recommended faculty professional development on effective classroom management, which is critical considering the majority of exclusionary discipline cases resulted from referrals by classroom educators for subjective deportment concerns and not from student possession of contraband. Using an online survey instrument, a sample of licensed educators in northeastern Illinois were asked to self-rate their preparedness in classroom management and indicate their awareness of zero tolerance policies. Results demonstrated significant difference of self-rated preparedness between general and special educators when addressing classroom deportment behaviors, while there was no difference in more intense behaviors (e.g., verbal threats, possession of contraband). Discussion on results and suggestions for future research are offered.

Keywords: zero tolerance; behavioral interventions; school-to-prison pipeline; teacher preparation, student support.