

State Moves Toward Better Learning Opportunities For Expelled Students

By DAVID DESROCHES • January 8, 2018

A few years ago, a group of lawyers sued the state, claiming that two students were denied their right to an education because they had been expelled. One of them was a boy of color who moved to another town after he was expelled.

“The new school district didn’t provide him with any education at all -- and actually kept him out of school longer than his expulsion,” said Marisa Halm, a lawyer for the Center for Children’s Advocacy, and part of the team that sued the state.

“So rather than provide him with an education like they were supposed to be doing, they kept him out of school,” Halm said. **“He missed over a year of school, it was pretty atrocious.”**

The state defines an expulsion as a student missing more than 10 consecutive school days. Students who are expelled tend to drop out more often, get into more trouble, and lose interest in learning. It can also harm school climate.



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Now, expulsions have been steadily declining since 2012, according to state data.

But the number of expelled students getting no education? That’s getting higher. At the same time, more students have been getting homework-only, and fewer students have had access to a structured alternative school program.

The legislature has passed two laws since 2015 requiring state educators to determine what an education should look like for expelled students. The State Board of Education’s recently-approved standards do just that, and also require districts to provide expelled students with that education.

The new system requires that the school hold a placement meeting when the student is expelled. The school is also supposed to create individualized learning programs for each student.

Halm has expressed concern that there’s no timeline that lays out when this meeting should be held, or when the plans should be developed.

“Ideally it should be held as soon as possible so that the student can expeditiously start school,” Halm said.

Eventually, the state would like to eliminate most forms of what officials call exclusionary discipline, and focus on what’s known as restorative practices. That considers a variety of student needs and incorporates family input, which is a big part of the state’s new standards.