

boston.com

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

Zero-tolerance policies can turn students into dropouts

The Boston Globe

November 21, 2009

YOUR NOV. 15 editorial "[Raise dropout age to 18](#)" cites favorably the recent report by the legislative commission on dropouts in Massachusetts. That report also recommends that schools consider the nexus between a student's alleged misconduct and the welfare of the school before excluding a student, and that schools provide a written explanation to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education before excluding a student for more than 10 days.

When the Legislature's Education Committee heard bills this month to raise the compulsory school age, it also heard testimony on an Act to Help Students Stay in School. This bill, reflecting research on the connection between school exclusion and dropout, is targeted at school "zero tolerance" policies.

More than 15 parents, organizations, experts, and advocates testified that many school exclusions result from nonserious offenses, that the number of school exclusions is increasing, and that students of color and students with disabilities are excluded from school with disproportionate frequency and for disproportionate periods of time.

If we are serious about reducing the high number of students who drop out from Massachusetts schools, we must end the practice of school exclusion for offenses, alleged to have occurred in school or out of school, that do not threaten the school community.

Thomas Mela

Director Children's Law Support Project Massachusetts Advocates for Children Boston ■

© Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company