

How Federal Education Guidelines from 2014 are Destroying Kids' Lives

In 2015, Intellectual Takeout [reported](#) that many classrooms in Saint Paul Public Schools had devolved into physical violence. If a recent [story](#) in the *Washington Times* is any indication, those incidents may be part of a growing nation-wide epidemic.

The children of Josh and Nicole Landers have had horrifying experiences in Baltimore County Public Schools. Their 9-year-old son was bullied so badly he left a note asking someone to end his life, their 11-year-old daughter was sexually assaulted, and their 18-year-old son feared for his life after being threatened by another student. A common theme in all three cases: the school failed to protect the victims and then failed to discipline the offenders.

Why are schools so reluctant to enact strict disciplinary policies?

The Landers family argues that a 2014 “Dear Colleague” [letter](#) issued by the Obama administration has played a significant role in reducing the disciplinary discretion that teachers have. The letter attempted to address the racial disparity in student discipline, since schools discipline minority students at a disproportionately higher rate.

The letter cites research from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), which found:

“Although African-American students represent 15% of students in the CRDC, they make up 35% of students suspended once, 44% of those suspended more than once, and 36% of students expelled. Further, over 50% of students who were involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or African-American.”

While the letter does not carry legal authority, it lays out guidelines to “help public elementary and secondary schools administer student discipline in a manner that does not discriminate on the basis of race.” The letter also raises the possibility of lawsuits for noncompliant schools and districts.

Instead of helping teachers enact discipline more equally, the guidelines have made teachers afraid to discipline at all. As the *Washington Times* article puts it, “rowdier classrooms may be a price worth paying in order to fend off a civil-rights probe and qualify for millions in federal grants.” The guidelines have apparently created unintended consequences that endanger kids in the name of social justice.

In districts that have implemented them, these guidelines have caused a marked reduction in the number of suspensions handed out. As the local Fox 45 news outlet [reported](#):

“Over the past decade, Maryland schools have seen significant drops in suspensions. Project Baltimore compiled 10 years of in-school and out-of-school

suspension data for Baltimore County. In 2007, the County had a total of 23,345 suspensions. By 2017, that number plummeted to 9,729.”

While these statistics give the appearance of behavioral improvement, the experience of the Landers’ children reveals a far bleaker reality.

The Daily Signal [reported](#) that 9-year-old Jared Landers’ suicidal note “was the culmination of months of bullying Jared endured in the classroom.” Among other things, this bullying involved “being struck in the face and thrown in the mud by another student. Even threats of electrocution.”

The Landers’ said they have decided to withdraw their two youngest children from public school and enroll them in private school, even though they admit doing so will create financial difficulties.

To fight for school discipline reform, the Landers’ have also started a [group](#) called “Parents Against School Violence” whose goals include getting Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to repeal the 2014 guidelines. The group’s membership has grown to over 1000 members and seeks to fight the issue on a local as well as national level.

In your own experience, have local public schools been unwilling to discipline students? If things continue to get worse, would you consider putting your children in a private school?

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