

Pittsburgh's Student Bill of Rights

A+ Schools' TeenBloc students won support from over 1,700 of their peers for this Student Bill of Rights. The Board of Education approved portions of these rights and incorporated them into the Student Code of Conduct.

We the students of Pittsburgh Public Schools, in order to form a more perfect district, do ordain and establish this Student Bill of Rights. The more perfect district will establish justice, ensure coexistence in the school community, promote general understanding, and secure all of the following rights entitled to all Pittsburgh Public School students:

1. We want to be able to exercise our First Amendment rights under the United States Constitution to the maximum extent possible.

We understand that any content shall not contain anything obscene, libelous, or slanderous as defined by the Pittsburgh Public Schools' Student Code of Conduct. We want to be able to express ourselves in an official school newspaper, to circulate petitions, to conduct polls, to set up information tables, to organize clubs, to sponsor speakers and activities, and to post notices on school bulletin boards.

2. We want opportunities to regularly discuss issues that impact our education with school board members, district administration, and school administration.

Schools shall inform students of these opportunities through a variety of means. In addition, we want the right to appeal any disciplinary action if it violates the right to a public education or other rights that are guaranteed under state or federal laws.

3. We want the right to equitable access to academic resources.

Schools are to provide every student with the appropriate tools and the necessary supports needed to graduate, go to college or pursue a career. The district shall ensure that there is an equitable distribution of effective teachers throughout Pittsburgh Public Schools.

4. We want to be in a positive learning environment that does not resemble a prison and where the fundamental dignity of all is protected.

All disciplinarians (including contracted service providers like bus drivers or security staff) are to be trained in youth development, positive behavior interventions, de-escalation techniques, and restorative justice practices.

5. We want positive classrooms that feel safe, respectful and welcoming where everyone can learn.

We want our teachers not only to care about our progress in the classroom but also to care about us as human beings. We want to be engaged in challenging and relevant learning and to the extent in which it can, we want it to be fun.

6. We want to go to schools free from bullying by students and adults.

No student shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, national origin, religion, disability, or economic status. We want an independent administrator to evaluate student treatment, to provide appropriate training and counseling to students and school staff, and to help school leaders create cultures of respect for all students.

7. We want to be educated by teachers who are knowledgeable about their discipline, who use various teaching strategies that contribute to a greater understanding of the subject matter, who are responsive to student input, and who are caring, supportive and culturally competent.

8. We want to be disciplined on an individual basis.

Group punishment for individual misdeeds shall not be permitted. Schools shall adopt positive forms of discipline to teach students appropriate social and behavioral skills. If any disciplinary action is taken, it is to be evidence-based, aimed at addressing the cause of the behavior, resolving the situation, restoring all relationships that were involved, refraining from criminalizing students, and bringing the students back into the school community in a positive manner. We want to be able to participate in school disciplinary committee meetings to provide input on how disciplinary policies are working in practice.

9. We want to be able to participate in accelerated academic classes and have access to our school's college counselor when we reach 9th grade.

A full range of Advanced Placement classes shall be accessible to all students regardless of the school in which they attend. We want to receive early college and career focused interventions including but not limited to vocational apprenticeships, guidance on course selection, college selection, and entrance exam test preparation.

10. We want efficient and safe transportation to school and school events.

Students with disabilities and students who are identified as homeless, in foster care, or listed as living outside of the home are not to be denied transportation.

WE DESERVE *to be* SERVED

TeenBloc students recognized that many of their peers received an inequitable education both within and across schools. Students experienced punitive discipline, and too often they lacked academic counseling and other resources needed for success. In 2013, they crafted a Student Bill of Rights (SBR), which outlined the rights students deserve as part of their education. They launched a campaign to incorporate the SBR into the Code of Student Conduct, and their call-to-action was supported by over 1,700 high school students.

What you'll read on this page are the results of surveying over 500 juniors and interviewing 26 staff members at each of the secondary schools.

Punitive practices

Zero tolerance policies suspend students on the first offense and are decided by each school. These and other punitive discipline practices only serve to alienate students from their school community and breed mistrust and disengagement, pushing them out instead of supporting their growth.



3 of 9 schools say they implement a behavioral support plan effectively

25%

of teachers are new to the building in more vulnerable schools



Restorative justice practices

Restorative justice is an alternative to using punishment to manage misconduct. Restorative justice practices help students understand their misbehaviors and use them as opportunities for social and emotional growth. Restorative justice holds students accountable to those directly harmed and indirectly impacted. Students are given a chance to repair and rebuild relationships.

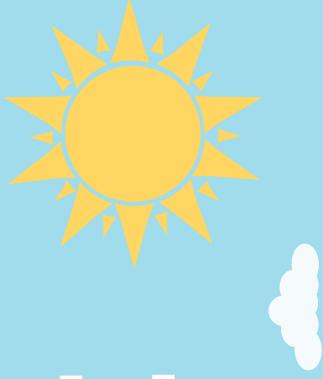
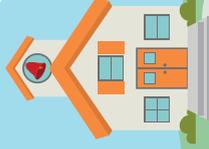
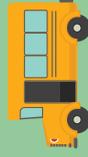
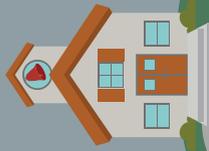
Restorative justice practices:

- Address the cause of the behavior
- Restore all relationships involved
- Ensure students catch up on missed work



13%

of teachers are new to the building in less vulnerable schools

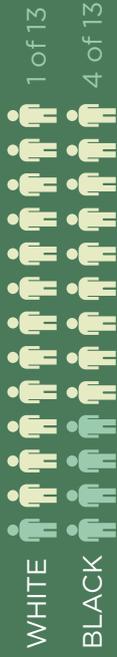




2 of 10 students feel they can discuss concerns with adults who will listen

2 of 10 students feel that most teachers care about their lives outside of school

PPS suspensions 2013-2014:



Some PPS students are suspended for:

- CELL PHONE USE
- SWEARING
- CUTTING CLASS

Only half of students understand reasons behind disciplinary action and think it is fair

ONLY ONE OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION IN THE 9TH GRADE DOUBLES A STUDENT'S RISK OF DROPPING OUT BEFORE GRADUATION*

*National data from Alliance for Educational Justice

Schools with more black and brown students have:

- Higher suspension rates and chronic absenteeism
- A higher percentage of long-term substitute teachers
- More staff giving group punishments
- Lack of principal stability



OVER **70%**

of students involved in school-related arrests or referred by law enforcement are latino or black*

*National data from Alliance for Educational Justice



Supportive schools do the following to uphold student rights:

Have ways for students to provide input and raise concerns:



DISCUSSIONS



DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE



COMMENT BOX

Prioritize college and career prep:

- Help students understand how to apply for college (only 1 in 4 students say their school does it)
- Students are assigned an academic counselor in 9th grade

Provide adults who demonstrate care for all students by:

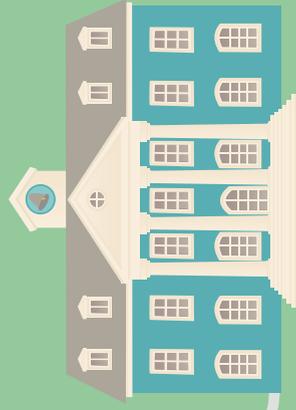
- Building respectful and trusting relationships
- Making themselves accessible when students have concerns
- Holding students accountable

Help students stay on track

The School Board voted to incorporate the Student Bill of Rights into the Code of Student Conduct in 2014.



Schools that uphold these rights will move students away from the path to prison and toward a path to success.



For more information about TeenBloc and how to get involved, please contact Markese Long at 412-697-1298, ext. 116 or m/long@aplussschools.org.

TeenBloc is an innovative youth leadership and student organizing program comprised of high school students dedicated to creating positive change within Pittsburgh Public Schools.