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New City Suspension Numbers Show Promise, Policy Change Still Needed

NEW YORK, NY – A new Department of Education [report on student discipline data](#) released Monday shows that school suspensions and the average length of time children are suspended are down—reflecting long fought-for progress in New York City's school climate reform efforts.

Data from July to December of 2018, when compared to the same period in 2017, shows a decrease of 14 percent in total suspensions. Short-term suspensions decreased by 11.7 percent and long-term suspensions decreased by almost 20 percent. Data obtained by [Chalkbeat](#) found that the average length of student suspensions fell from 8.3 to 5.8 days, a 30 percent reduction, while the average length of long-term suspensions fell from 21.4 days to 13.4 days, a 37 percent decline. Last year during this time period advocates had raised alarm after it was reported that [suspension use surged](#), reversing years of steady decline.

"This is a positive step forward and at the same time this is just more reason to work harder this year," said Khushayah Morris, a high school sophomore in Brooklyn and education justice advocate with the Children's Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY). "I see this effort to keep suspensions at bay but the Department of Education isn't going to really report consistent improvement unless we make sure that schools have the resources they need to make lasting change."

CDF-NY has long urged the city to revise the Discipline Code to reflect the negative impact of long-term suspensions on school environments and on students' academic trajectories in New York City schools. We have also advocated for the Code to limit long-term suspensions to a maximum of 20 days to align with the proposed Judge Judith S. Kaye Safe and Supportive Schools Act. The Mayor's own Leadership Team report describes how, on average, students in New York City who receive suspensions of 30 days or more have lower attendance and graduation rates the year after they complete their suspension – demonstrating that the temporary deprivation of children's access to school often turns into an absolute one.

"A decrease in suspensions means students are able to have a whole new desire for learning and develop a passion they would want to grow," said Gary Edwards, a high school senior in Brooklyn. "We also must remember what those over 20,000 suspensions are doing to our leaders of tomorrow. Improvements were made but more effort needs to be put in and we are aiming for sustainable change."

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The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.