



# Discipline Policy Updates: Substance-Use and Possession

Recently, important changes have occurred regarding discipline in schools. These changes relate to substance-use and substance possession. The new [Student Discipline Rules](#) task schools with:

- Improving proactive behavior supports, and
- Moving away from zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions

What the Law Says:

- Apart from firearms violations, school districts are not required to suspend or expel students for any behavior and state law, under RCW [28A.600.015\(7\)](#), explicitly encourages school districts to “consider alternative actions” before administering suspension or expulsion

Starting in the 2019–20 School Year:

- New rules require school districts to first attempt other forms of discipline before administering a short-term or in-school suspension.
- Some school or district policies classify substance violations as “exceptional misconduct”. The provisions that made this allowable will no longer be in effect beginning in the 2019-20 school year.
- For long-term suspensions and expulsions, the new rules require school districts to consider other forms of discipline to support the student in meeting behavioral expectations.
- School districts must eliminate any zero-tolerance approaches in discipline policies and procedures that require a mandatory suspension or expulsion in response to any behavioral violation other than firearms violations.

## Mandated Treatment and Assessments

Some school districts have been in the practice of mandating that students receive drug and alcohol assessments or treatment; such practices are not allowable under current and prior state law.

- RCW [28A.600.410](#) provides that districts may reduce the length of a student’s suspension conditioned by the commencement of treatment services—which may include completion of a drug assessment. However, nothing in the law *requires* a parent or student to do so, and districts cannot indefinitely suspend a student pending any scheduling or completion of such services.
- RCW [28A.600.015\(1\)](#) and RCW [28A.600.020\(6\)](#) prohibit school districts from administering suspensions or expulsions indefinitely and require that suspensions or expulsions must have an end date. Thus, mandating students access services that may be unavailable or unwanted is not allowable.

## Resources

**Student Discipline Website:** <http://www.k12.wa.us/studentdiscipline/default.aspx>

- *New Student Discipline Rules Q&A: A Technical Guide*  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/studentdiscipline/Rules/pubdocs/TechnicalGuide.pdf>
- *Discipline in Schools: A Parent Guide (available in 11 languages)*  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/studentdiscipline/Rules/pubdocs/ParentQA-English.pdf>
- *Family Quick Guide on New Discipline Rules*  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/studentdiscipline/Rules/pubdocs/Student-Discipline-Rules-An-Introduction.pdf>