

Questions New School-Discipline Rules

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, October 19, 2015 5:30 pm

Mayor de Blasio last week signed into law a bill that will require the Department of Education and the NYPD to provide more information about how students are disciplined and restrained in the city's public schools. In response, the president of the union representing School Safety Agents said he remained dissatisfied with policies he said could make students and his members less safe.



What's Now Required

Intro. 730, co-sponsored by City Council Public Safety Committee Chair Vanessa Gibson and signed into law Oct. 13, expands the 2011 School Safety Act to require the DOE to regularly report on student suspensions, Teacher removals, transfers that occur during suspensions and the number of times schools call EMS officers. The NYPD, which employs SSAs, will report on the use of metal detectors in schools as well as how many times students are handcuffed, arrested or given summonses.

“We’ll be able to better monitor where suspensions, arrests, and summonses are concentrated, so that we can target resources where they are most needed, to get, again, to the root causes,” Mr. de Blasio said. “And we look forward to finding and eliminating inconsistencies and disparities in the punishment of students, ensuring that our school-disciplinary practices are both equitable and effective.”

The bill-signing followed “school-climate reforms” pushed this year by the de Blasio administration and backed by education advocates and the New York Civil Liberties Union, who argue that overly harsh punishments often unfairly stigmatize minority and poor students.

Schools will also track use-of-force or abuse-of-authority complaints about SSAs and any injuries inflicted on the officers, the latter of which Teamsters Local 237 President Greg Floyd said he fought to have included. “They’re not punching bags that are there to be injured by mistake,” he said of the SSAs. “They actually are real people with feelings.”

Ending Harsh Punishments?

ENDING ‘HARSH

PUNISHMENTS?: Mayor de Blasio signs a bill into law Oct. 13 that requires the Department of Education and the NYPD to report on schools’ disciplinary practices and their use of restraints. Flanking him are co-sponsors Vanessa Gibson (left) and Corey Johnson.

More Changes to Come

The new law, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2016, was one of several recommendations by a school-climate team that includes five working groups. “We’ll be announcing some additional steps in this direction in the very near future,” the Mayor said.

According to figures released this summer by the Mayor’s Office, 49 percent of summonses and 19 percent of arrests by the NYPD’s School Safety Division were concentrated at 10 campuses. Of the 10 schools with the highest suspension rates, there were 63 suspensions for every 100 students, a rate much higher than average.

School Crime Down

He said that there was a 29-percent drop in crime in public schools between the 2011-12 and 2014-15 school years and that suspensions declined by more than one-third and arrests by two-thirds over the same period. Officials said earlier this year that arrests by SSAs or other school-safety officers declined from 759 in 2012 to 360 last year.

“Suspensions and zero-tolerance policies have adversely impacted many vulnerable students, overly burdened African-American, Latino, students of color and students with disabilities and did not lead to positive behavioral changes nor academic success,” Ms. Gibson said. (The legislation, her first to become law, passed the City Council last month with all 44 Council Members present casting votes in favor.)

But Mr. Floyd argued that the reports and the policy changes announced this year didn’t take into account assaults on agents or weapons being brought into schools and could stunt crime reductions. He said that he didn’t have figures on SSAs attacked in schools, but that they were routinely injured breaking up fights and dealing with other incidents. “When the numbers come out, the figures are going to be alarmingly high,” he said.

Based on feedback from the local, the bill was modified to include the number of injuries sustained by NYPD personnel, the number of times they have been referred to EMS and the amount and type of contraband seized, a spokeswoman for Ms. Gibson said. In a statement, she added the law will allow the city to collect more “data from which to devise smart and meaningful policy.”

The school-climate panel also recommended reviewing the metal detectors being used in 80 schools across the city. Mr. Floyd said he would forcefully advocate against removing the scanners, pointing to a brawl and stabbing last month near the Barclays Center involving students from the John Jay Educational Campus where students in March protested their treatment by SSAs and have asked to remove metal detectors. “If they want to take metal detectors out of

schools, let's start with the Tweed Building first, and then City Hall," he said.