



HB 822 Compromises Equitable Education Opportunities in the Name of School Safety

IDRA Testimony against HB 822, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the House Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee on March 29, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Neave and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Araceli Garcia, and I am an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA. IDRA is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We respectfully oppose HB 822.

Schools and communities should investigate and take every potential threat to school safety seriously, but HB 822's proposal to expel students assessed as a "terroristic threat" is not the best answer. HB 822 departs from the nearly decade-long bipartisan effort of the Texas Legislature to ensure students are not subject to harsh and inappropriate punishments. Instead, there has been a push to use research-based strategies to identify and address any school safety.

Data show that Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately accused of engaging in behaviors that constitute a terroristic threat (Fowler & Craven, 2018). Because the definition and categorization of terroristic threat is so broad, students are left to the subjective interpretation of teachers about who and what constitutes a terroristic threat.

Regressive policies rooted in fear instead of evidence do more harm than good in our schools. Many students accused of terroristic threat in schools actually exhibit age-appropriate behaviors that could be addressed by school-based personnel, rather than criminalized. Research-based alternatives to punitive, criminalizing measures in schools promote safer practices to create positive school climates (Craven, Johnson & Wilson, 2020).

The way to keep our schools safe from threats is to ensure all students and adults are given the resources they need to be engaged members of their communities. Expelling and forsaking students only isolates them, which could have severe consequences on their mental health and well-being and compromise their educational opportunities (Craven, Johnson & Wilson, 2020).

As the bill currently reads, HB 822 does not solve our schools' safety issues and, in fact, stands to exacerbate them. We hope that the committee will consider these unintended consequences and ensure that any legislation comes from a place of equity rather than fear.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

Craven, M., Johnson, P., & Wilson, T. (Summer 2020). Eradicating the School-to-Prison Pipeline through a Comprehensive Approach to School Equity. *Arkansas Law Review*.

<http://onlinedigeditions.com/publication/?m=33032&i=667289&p=8>

Fowler, D., & Craven, M. (2018). Collateral Consequences: The Increase in Texas Student Arrests Following the Parkland and Santa Fe Tragedies. *Texas Appleseed*.

<http://stories.texasappleseed.org/collateral-consequences>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.