

**Message from:** Andrew Feinstein

**Organization:** Special Education Equity for Kids (SEEK)

**Sent:** 2024-03-27

**Message:**

SEEK wishes to become closely involved with the Commission. We are concerned that the Commission is focusing too much on responding to disconnected youth and not enough on what we, as a society, do to create that disconnection. In the education setting, we repel teenagers by offering a boring, abstract and meaningless curriculum. We follow a one-size-fits-all model, based on the Common Core, that teaches students how to write persuasive essays in a corporate team setting. While that is relevant for some students, imposing it on all alienates a fair proportion.

We have turned schools into law enforcement agencies, in which many teenagers, particularly males and teens of color, only interact with school leaders in relation to behavior and punishment. Connecticut high schools are not, for the most part, a warm and welcoming environment. This miasma encourages absenteeism.

There is a much more immediate and direct way to substantially reduce the number of at-risk students and disconnected youth: End expulsion and out-of-school suspension. Ban them. Make them illegal. In their zest to enforce rules, some school superintendents have forgotten that their job is to nurture and develop youth. Instead, they make believe that education is a privilege that should be withdrawn if the student does not follow the rules. We have created a generation of at-risk students and disconnected youth, in part, because our schools have kicked out the students most in need of support. Let's seal off the school-to-prison pipeline. Kids who exhibit troubling, disruptive or dangerous behavior are kids we ought to be holding close, kids who should be provided with a panoply of social, behavioral and mental health supports, kids who we should embrace, not reject.

We are glad to participate in your June and July hearings, but we are concerned that the workplan of the Commission treats education issues as a sideline and is focused on disciplinary consequences, not on the type of interventions that could actually reduce alienation, absenteeism and disconnection.