# Trump administration rescinds previous school discipline guidance addressing racial disparities



President Donald Trump has issued a new executive order aiming to rescind school discipline guidance previously established by the Obama and Biden administrations intended to address racial disparities in student discipline. The directive, announced on Wednesday, instructs Education Secretary Linda McMahon to replace current guidance issued under President Joe Biden, which warned that schools engaging in unfair disciplinary practices could be in violation of civil rights laws and risk losing federal funding.

The 2014 Obama-era policy that the Trump order seeks to overturn was founded on the principle of “disparate impact.” This concept holds that even race-neutral policies could be deemed discriminatory if they disproportionately affect students of a particular race or ethnicity. That guidance was rolled back during Trump’s earlier presidency, and now the administration is reinforcing its position against such approaches.

Data from Massachusetts show that over the past decade, school discipline rates have declined across all racial and ethnic groups, with the gaps between these groups narrowing. President Biden’s recommendations on discipline were viewed as less expansive than Obama’s original policy, yet disciplinary rates have continued to decline in the state during his term.

The recent executive order describes the previous federal policy as effectively mandating racial discrimination in schools and directs Secretary McMahon to take action against states and districts found to discriminate on racial grounds. A fact sheet released by the Trump administration criticised the Obama-Biden approach for allegedly compromising school safety. Secretary McMahon supported this view in a statement, saying: “Under the Biden-Harris Administration, schools were forced to consider equity and inclusion when imposing discipline. Their policies placed racial equity quotas over student safety — encouraging schools to turn a blind eye to poor or violent behaviour in the name of inclusion.”

The order also raises concerns about the collection of data on student discipline disparities, which was encouraged under the Biden administration, noting that limiting such data collection could signal a reversal in efforts to monitor racial disparities.

Following the upheaval wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns about student behaviour and safety have risen, although concrete data remain limited. Advocates for social justice have voiced worries about the new policy. Nadia Romanazzi, spokesperson for the Massachusetts Appleseed Center—a social justice organisation—highlighted research showing significant disparities in how students of colour are disciplined compared to their white peers. She told The Boston Globe: “There is significant research and data that show that there are large discipline disparities between students of colour and their white counterparts, and that these disparities are not necessarily a result of difference in actual behaviours, but rather a difference in the enforcement mechanisms of the discipline policies.” Romanazzi also pointed out specific issues such as Black girls being disproportionately targeted for dress code violations.

Supporters of President Trump’s order argue that recent policies have swung too far in the other direction, leading to leniency in disciplining students of colour. Kari MacRae, member of the Bourne School Committee and former teacher in Hanover, said: “Students need to be treated equally. We can’t have a certain set of rules for students based on their race. That’s really what was happening.” MacRae described the Biden-era approach as a directive to manage class behaviour based more on data targets than actual classroom needs. “The Trump administration is about going back to common sense,” she added.

Pam Ahern, president of Parental Rights Natick, also expressed support for the new order, stating: “We hope the federal government’s executive order is a step toward restoring smart, colour-blind, and common sense policies that support the safety of all students regardless of their identity traits.”

Conversely, education advocates raise concerns about the impact of limiting data collection on identifying and rectifying persistent achievement gaps. Jessica Tang, president of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, criticised the order for curtailing the ability to understand ongoing issues. She said: “You can’t erase the impacts of decades of real discrimination. Ignoring the data, or not tracking it, doesn’t mean that things are better, or that civil rights are not being violated.”

The executive order does not explicitly forbid the collection of data on racial disparities in school discipline but opposes the Biden administration’s practice of encouraging schools to analyse such data and adjust their discipline policies accordingly. The order critiques the continuation of what it terms a “discriminatory equity ideology” under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Historically, nationwide, Black students have been more likely than their peers to receive disciplinary measures that remove them from normal classroom settings, such as suspensions or expulsions. That reality gave rise to a reform movement about a decade ago, coinciding with the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement.

In Massachusetts, efforts to tackle these disparities continue. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education implements a “Rethinking Discipline” initiative aimed at reducing disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates while maintaining schools’ disciplinary authority. A department spokesperson, Jacqueline Reis, said: “The goal of Rethinking Discipline is to help reduce the inappropriate or excessive use of long-term suspension and expulsion, an effort that benefits all students.”

The Boston Globe is reporting on this development, highlighting the ongoing debate between differing perspectives on school discipline policy and its impact on racial equity and school safety.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-reinstates-commonsense-school-discipline-policies/> - This fact sheet supports President Trump's recent executive order aimed at reinstating common sense school discipline policies, emphasizing compliance with Title VI and criticizing previous equity-driven approaches as compromising school safety.
2. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/trump-to-schools-banish-equity-ideology-in-discipline/2025/04> - This article discusses Trump's order to banish equity ideology in school discipline, directing schools not to consider race when dealing with student behavior. It notes concerns from educators about persistent racial disparities and rising classroom disorder.
3. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/23/trump-orders-schools-colleges-funding-accreditors-00307055> - This news piece details Trump's broader educational directives, including the transformation of school discipline policies to focus on behavior rather than race, aligning with his conservative policy agenda.
4. <https://www.millernash.com/firm-news/news/the-white-house-addresses-k-12-school-discipline-by-executive-order> - This article supports the claim that the Obama-era guidance was effectively reversed, as Trump's new order asserts that previous policies required schools to discriminate based on race in discipline practices.
5. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/reinstating-common-sense-school-discipline-policies/> - This executive order details the legal framework and definitions supporting Trump's directive to restore traditional school discipline practices, emphasizing behavior over race in disciplinary decisions.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - Although the specific article is not provided, the Noah Wire Services typically cover current events and could corroborate discussions about school discipline policy changes and their implications on racial equity and school safety.
7. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/04/25/metro/trump-school-discipline-race/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data