State Initiatives to Improve School Climate and Discipline

Introduction
The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) seeks applicants to join a network of state boards of education dedicated to improving school climate and student discipline. This six-month project will continue to expand NASBE’s mission to strengthen the capacity of state boards of education to promote excellence in the education of all students and to advocate equality of access to educational opportunity. The project is funded through the support of Open Society Foundations.

Eligibility
All state boards of education are eligible to apply for the State Initiatives to Improve School Climate, Safety, and Discipline stipend; however, preference will be given to members of NASBE.

Technical Assistance
For technical assistance with completing the application, please contact Kimberly Charis, Director of School Climate, Discipline, and Equity at kimberly.charis@nasbe.org or (703) 740-4832.

Deadline
All completed applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 9, 2015. Submit applications to kimberly.charis@nasbe.org.

Timeline
Application deadline: September 9, 2015 at 5:00 p.m.
Award announcement: September 18, 2015
Stipend duration: 6 months
Stipend period: October 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016

Stipend Awards Available
Stipend award: $4,000 to $8,000 for six months
Number of stipends: 1 to 2 states
Application Components
A completed application must include these six components:

1) General Information
2) Statement of Interest and Commitment
3) Capacity and State Environment
4) Strategic Partnerships
5) Goals and Objectives
6) Budget Narrative

Background

Zero-tolerance and other forms of exclusionary discipline adversely impact teaching and learning for all students. Schools that rely on exclusionary discipline as a means to maintain order and school safety typically receive lower school climate ratings from students, teachers, parents and communities. Furthermore, when students are excluded from school for behavior that does not pose a threat to school safety, they lose important instruction time, which lowers attendance, graduation rates, and academic performance. This could further widen the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color who are disproportionately affected by these policies.

The US Department of Education’s latest Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) revealed that students of certain racial and ethnic groups and students with disabilities receive higher rates of punitive or exclusionary punishment than their peers.¹ Black students represent 16% of the student population, but 32-42% of students suspended or expelled. American Indian and Native-Alaskan students represent less than 1% of the student population but 2% of out-of-school suspensions and 3% of expulsions. Students in multiple subgroups are even more likely to be suspended. For example, black students with disabilities are more likely to receive out-of-school suspension than their peers with disabilities. According to the CRDC, higher rates of disciplinary action against students of color are not the result of more frequent or serious incidents of misconduct, suggesting that these students are punished more harshly than their peers.

Federal law prohibits schools from disciplining students based on personal characteristics. The US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice support schools in their efforts to create safe and orderly learning environments; however, they will often initiate civil rights investigations based on complaints of disparities or possible discrimination on the basis of race, religion, disability, or sex. In January 2014, the Departments released a school climate and discipline guidance package to assist districts and schools in their efforts to avoid, identify, and correct discriminatory discipline.

State education agencies that regularly review school climate and discipline data can ensure that educational opportunities are maximized for all students. However, the lack of coordination and communication between the state education agency and local jurisdictions make it difficult for


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policymakers to get a clear, comprehensive picture of school climate and student achievement across the state. Furthermore, the misinterpretation of federal law as well as the insufficient collection and review of data may result in a violation of students’ civil rights.

The State Initiatives to Improve School Climate, Safety, and Discipline project will highlight the state’s role in holding districts accountable for providing equal educational opportunities to all students and making sure schools administer discipline without discrimination. NASBE will work with states to demonstrate the need for appropriately designed and integrated state-level school climate and discipline data systems and develop state-level action plans to improve policies and practices. These plans will include a comprehensive review of data across the state, identification of exemplary models of excellence in school climate and discipline practices, and a commitment to support struggling districts and hold them accountable for closing persistent gaps.

Strategies

All stipend recipients will employ the following strategies that will result in an action plan at the end of the six-month grant period:

1. **Assessment of Policies.** Review the state’s data collection and reporting policies.
2. **Assessment of School Climate and Discipline Data Systems.** Review the state’s infrastructure for collecting and reviewing data and providing technical assistance to local districts.
3. **Strengthening Partnerships.** Devise a plan for the state board of education along with the state education agency to work collaboratively with local education agencies and school administrators in order to strengthen communication at all system levels.
4. **Development of an Action Plan.** Develop a technical assistance plan that includes a concrete timetable and clearly defined steps to identify and support districts that have persistent challenges with improving school climate and discipline.
5. **Collaborate Across the Network.** Attend NASBE’s annual conference and participate in virtual discussions and webinars to help build a knowledge network of state policymakers.

NASBE Support

NASBE is committed to facilitating the work of the stipend state(s) and will provide substantial state-specific support as needed.

- Technical support for the development of stipend applications as requested.
- Work with the state leadership team to devise a Memorandum of Understanding that will include a final budget designed to meet the specific needs of the stipend state(s).
- Develop and refine a model by which states can conduct a comprehensive audit of all school climate and discipline data.
- Meet with the stipend state(s) to assist with the policy audits and action plan development.
- Provide regular training throughout the grant cycle as needed. Training will be tailored to the needs of each state. Joint trainings may be offered to a group of states dealing with common issues and priorities and thereby encourage development of an interstate network.

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These trainings and supplemental supports may be delivered via webinar, conference calls, or other electronic means. NABSE will open the training to non-network states depending on the level of interest.

- Facilitate connections with experts to provide guidance and coordination between state and local systems.
- Support ongoing opportunities to foster networking, communication, and coordination and serve as a conduit for information exchange, including facilitating collaboration between the stipend recipient(s) and other states.

**Selection Considerations**

1. **Readiness**: Demonstration of board and state readiness and commitment for policy work in the area as documented in the application narrative.
2. **Capacity for Action**: The extent to which there is proven capacity for growth and successful implementation of the project goals in an effective, strategic, and collaborative manner as well as a commitment to working with other governmental entities.
3. **Board Capacity and Policy Strengthening**: State commitment to taking state board action based on the policy audit and process implementation, if applicable.
4. **Board Commitment**: The stated commitment of the state board of education and the designation of a state board member liaison to participate fully in the stipend work.
5. **Impact**: The extent to which activities measurably impact the state goals and move policy forward in the state.

**Application Procedures**

1. Submit a fully completed application by 5:00 p.m. on **Wednesday, September 9, 2015**.
2. Demonstrate the commitment of the state board in writing with the signature of the Chair or Vice Chair.
# STATE STIPEND APPLICATION

State Initiatives to Improve School Climate and Discipline

## GENERAL INFORMATION

| State | [ ] |

State Board of Education Chair or Vice Chair signature

Name, title, phone and email of state liaison:

Name, phone and email of the lead State Board of Education member (if different from above):

Is your state board a member of NASBE, yes or no?

[ ]

Date of State Board discussion (or anticipated vote) on stipend application:

[ ]
Application Narrative (limit each response to one, double-spaced typed page)

1. **Statement of Interest and Commitment:** Describe the level of interest of your state board of education in this stipend and the level of commitment shown from members. Why are you interested in joining this project initiative? What you hope to achieve? How will you ensure the work progresses as outlined in the agreed-upon work plan? What processes are in place to monitor the progress of the work plan and make adjustments as necessary?

2. **Capacity and State Landscape:** Describe the state board’s capacity to accomplish the activities in this proposal. Why do you believe your state board of education has the capacity to undertake this initiative at this time? What is the current landscape of your state in terms of school climate and discipline data collection and review? In addition to financial and human resources, consider state experience in related areas, knowledge and passion of state board members and state education agency staff, public will and interest, and other stakeholder expertise and capacity.

3. **Strategic Partnerships:** Describe the current and potential state board relationships with key stakeholders related to this initiative, particularly the state education agency and local districts. What critical partnerships exist that will assist with this work? What entities will you include in the planning and execution of the work plan? What relationship exists with other political entities impacted by this work – legislature, governor’s office, local districts, etc.? How will you communicate regularly with various stakeholders throughout the stipend period?

4. **Goals and Objectives:** Please share the general goals you wish to accomplish by joining this project initiative and list some specific objectives that you will include in your action plan. Please note that a final Memorandum of Understanding will be agreed-upon that will include specific goals and objectives developed jointly by NASBE and your leadership team.

5. **Budget Narrative:** Please share your general proposal for how the stipend funds ($4,000 to $8,000) will be spent over the six-month stipend period. General categories are fine, as a specific budget will be jointly constructed by NASBE and your leadership team as part of the Memorandum of Understanding.

### Proposed budget based upon the stipend award (as outlined in the budget narrative)

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<td>Conferences, Conventions, and Meetings (facilities, food etc.)</td>
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