

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH
CRITICAL LEADERSHIP, POLICY AND PRACTICE



School Discipline and Administrator Decision-Making



A Transnational Perspective



STEPHANIE CHITPIN, DAVID C. YOUNG
AND MARVIN ZUKER

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Series editor: Stephanie Chitpin

Transforming Education Through Critical Leadership, Policy and Practice is based on the belief that those in educational leadership and policy-constructing roles have an obligation to educate for a robust critical and democratic polity in which citizens can contribute to an open and socially just society. Advocating for a critical, socially just democracy goes beyond individual and procedural concerns characteristic of liberalism and seeks to raise and address fundamental questions pertaining to power, privilege and oppression. It recognizes that much of what has gone under the name of “transformational leadership” in education seeks to transform very little, but rather it serves to reproduce systems that generate structural inequalities based on class, gender, race, (dis)ability and sexual orientation.

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School Discipline and Administrator Decision-Making: A Transnational Perspective

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Stephanie Chitpin dedicates this book to the memory of her guardians, Ah Feeti of Fook Soo Am and Mr Chui Wan Cheong.

David C. Young would like to dedicate this book to the memory of his father, Clarke Young, and his grandmother, Emma Dawson.

Marvin Zuker would like to dedicate this book to the memory of his mother, Pearl H. Zuker.

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Foreword

Behaviour is a core element in running a successful school, but while there is a large literature on the ‘mechanics’ of behaviour management, and how teachers should best approach the behavioural challenges they face in their classrooms, there is far less focus on the links between state/national policy and the practical leadership of behaviour.

How policy is enacted by those who are responsible for the running of schools is an important issue. Using case studies from Mauritius and Canada, this volume gives a valuable insight into how leaders interpret and follow policy decisions, and the issues which this presents. It also considers how leaders interact with and need to take account of other stakeholders, both those above them in formal hierarchies, but also through consideration of the needs of children and their families. This shines a light on the complex responsibilities leaders deal with every day, acting as a bridge between external political decisions and the complex lifeworld of their schools.

This volume explores a complex area of leadership work through a number of lenses and demonstrates well the tensions and challenges which behaviour presents in educational settings. It provides much to reflect on and poses many questions for those interested in leadership, policy enactment and their relationship to successful behaviour management.

Phil Wood, Professor of Education,
Nottingham Trent University

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Chapter 1

Situating School Discipline in Mauritius

Introduction

Among school-related influences on student learning, school leadership is second only to teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). And it goes without saying that school leadership involves making myriad decisions. Recent ‘social, economic and demographic changes’ also produce ‘tremendous pressure on educational systems to respond to the accompanying growth in the diversity of student enrolment’ (Anisef & Kilbride, 2004, p. 10), and school leaders are called upon to meet the demands of this transformation (Goddard & Hart, 2007). Routinization in leadership decision-making (Lumby & English, 2009) and the expectation to perform (Chitpin & Jones, 2015) can limit divergent thinking practices.

An important contemporary educational factor that principals must face is that of school discipline. And exacerbating this issue is that racial/ethnic achievement gaps are correlated to disciplinary gaps where the smaller the disciplinary gap between white and minority students, the smaller the achievement gap between those groups (Pearman et al., 2019). In fact, not only are minority students or students living with an exceptionality more likely to be suspended or expelled, even for minor infractions, those suspensions and expulsions are usually longer and result in students missing more school than their white peers. This is indeed a troubling issue.

Professional accountability models encourage educators to remain committed to and accountable for student achievement and outcomes (Klinger et al., 2011). However, such accountability models create complicated and multifaceted operational decision-making environments for principals to improve academic processes and learning outcomes over time (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Although there is a growing body of research on data-informed decision-making (Hargreaves et al., 2015), relatively little is known regarding how principals use available data to improve student achievement and decrease inequitable discipline in Canada. This is of particular importance, as principals and policymakers, seeking to close achievement gaps in public schools, have come to recognize the harmful consequences of suspension and expulsion. A growing body of research has concluded these exclusionary forms of discipline disproportionately impact student groups

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traditionally underserved by public education systems (Sullivan et al., 2014). To address persistent inequity among student groups on school outcomes, caused in part by exclusionary discipline practices, educational policy and research is shifting efforts towards closing ‘opportunity gaps’ that result when learning is negatively impacted or hindered when students cannot attend class or are not allowed to be present at school. The use of disproportionate exclusionary discipline is one factor that deprives groups of students of learning opportunities.

Principals’ school discipline-related decision-making is crucial in increasing overall student achievement (Stiggins, 2004, 2007). Exploration of principals’ decision-making frameworks has the potential to connect scholars and school leaders in influential ways, given the focus on continuously improving academic outcomes and furthering goals of equity. This book, situated in the contexts of Mauritius and Canada, will assist principals in making sound decisions, grounded in theory and based on high-quality data, while considering their unique school contexts. When dealing with complex, school-related problems and challenges, such as optimizing student outcomes of visible minority students, researchers and principals may gain broader understandings of the decision-making processes involved.

Parameters and Specifics of This Book

Much of the material contained within the pages of this book are derived from searches of the relevant literature on the topic of school leadership and school discipline. It is important to keep in mind that ‘the first step in research is to assess what is already known...’ (Jesson et al., 2013, p. 3). In terms of this work, the authors conducted an initial scan of the field to determine what sources were available. To employ a technical vocabulary, we engaged in what is often referred to as a scoping review, in which the effort was directed at documenting what was already known, all the while maintaining a critical stance. As such, while conducting a thorough review of the available databases, we maintained a detailed search record. Although a wealth of information is readily available on school leadership, much of the material regarding discipline was not particularly relevant to the topic addressed in this book. In fact, more success was found in examining the various government documents to ascertain the situation in Mauritius and Canada. Regardless, when combining the material in totality, a picture does emerge. One is also able to draw some conclusions as to how the system might be restructured to ensure an efficient delivery of services.

Once the scoping activity was concluded, the findings were written via a thematic analysis. That is, material was chunked according to emergent patterns.

Mauritius: Setting the Stage

Mauritius is a subtropical island situated in the Indian Ocean, off the south-eastern coast of Africa. Its territories include Rodrigues Island and other smaller islands such as Agalega. Historically, Mauritius was a French colony

from 1715 until 1810, and a colony of Britain from 1810 to 1968. Since its independence from Britain in 1968 and its elevation to a Republic in 1992, Mauritius has developed a pre-primary to tertiary education system based largely on the British model of education (Hansen & Ramdenee-Soobhug, 2023). School discipline is largely under the purview of the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, with the responsibility for day-to-day discipline conferred on school principals. In Mauritius, suspensions and expulsions as disciplinary tools are used rather infrequently, with the main goal being to provide students with opportunities to redeem themselves, thus enhancing their educational opportunities. This chapter will explore, via a review of the literature, the education system in Mauritius, with particular emphasis on the issue of school discipline. The argument will be contextualized via reference to relevant policies as well as litigation.

Education in Mauritius: The Contemporary System

As noted previously, the education system in Mauritius is based on the British model. It is divided into four main sectors, with the first being pre-primary education. The pre-primary system delivers education to children aged 3–5 years. Schools within this sector are engaged in activities related to early childhood care and education. Essentially, the goal of a pre-primary school is to ensure a smooth transition for all children from preschool to primary school. Primary education, which is mandatory in Mauritius, involves children aged 5–11 years. Beginning in 2017, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology introduced the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education system. Under this system, students complete Grades 1 to 6 in a primary school and at the conclusion of their primary education, students take part in an assessment leading to the awarding of the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC). Secondary education, which focuses on students 11–18 years of age, has been mandatory in Mauritius since 1977. In 2005, it was mandated that secondary education be compulsory for all students up to the age of 16. All Mauritian students completing Primary Grade 6 move to Grade 7 in a secondary school to complete the last 3 years of the nine-year basic education cycle. Grades 7 to 9 (or Lower Secondary Education) correspond to the last 3 years of the nine-year continuous basic education cycle. At the end of the basic education cycle, students will complete the National Certificate of Education (NCE) assessment. Upon completion of their basic education, students pursue their secondary education in Grades 10 to 11, and at the conclusion of grade 11, they complete the Cambridge School Certificate/General Certificate of Education ‘O’ level examination. Those students who are successful on this assessment progress to Upper Secondary Education in Grades 12 and 13 ultimately leading to the Cambridge Higher School Certificate/General Certificate of Education ‘A’ level examination (Ministry of Education and Human Resource, 2025a). Tertiary education in Mauritius currently rests upon the 2019 decision by the government to introduce free higher education in Public Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs). There are

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approximately 10 Public Tertiary Education Institutions and 39 private institutions providing tertiary education in Mauritius ([Higher Education Commission Mauritius, 2025](#)). These institutions offer a large variety of courses leading to qualifications ranging from diploma to doctoral degrees.

Although the Government of Mauritius is the largest education provider in the country and provides free education to its citizens from pre-primary to tertiary, there are also private schools/institutions in Mauritius. The right to establish schools is enshrined in Sections 3 and 14 of the Mauritian *Constitution*. Specifically, Section 3 of the *Constitution* recognizes and declares that one of the human rights and fundamental freedoms that has existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination is the ‘freedom to establish schools’ ([Meetarbhan, 2017](#), pp. 104–105). Section 14(1) of the *Constitution* provides that ‘No religious denomination and no religious, social, ethnic or cultural association or group shall be prevented from establishing and maintaining schools at its own expense’ ([Mauritius National Assembly, 2018](#)).

As such, there are three main types of education providers in Mauritius:

- i. public schools/institutions;
- ii. aided private schools/institutions (private schools in receipt of a grant in aid from government funds);
- iii. non-aided private schools/institutions (private schools which operate only with private funds).

As of 2021, the number of schools providing pre-primary education stood at 789; of this total, 755 were on the Island of Mauritius and 34 in Rodrigues. Of these schools, 537 (68.1%) were privately run institutions; 192 (24.3%), operating on government primary school premises, were administered by the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority and the remaining 60 (7.6%) were administered by either Roman Catholic (RC) or Hindu Education Authorities or Municipal/Village Councils ([Ministry of Education and Human Resource, 2025b](#), p. 2).

In 2021, the number of students attending primary schools in the Republic of Mauritius stood at 84,129. In October 2021, there were 319 schools providing primary education, with 302 of these on the Island of Mauritius and 17 in Rodrigues. The majority (221) of schools were administered by the government, 51 by the Roman Catholic Education Authority, 2 by the Hindu Education Authority and the other 45 were private non-aided schools. Around 63% of students were enrolled in government schools and the remainder enrolled in private aided and non-aided schools ([Ministry of Education and Human Resource, 2025b](#), p. 3).

Secondary education enrolment stood at 102,722 in 2021. Around 43.8% of the secondary school population was enrolled in state schools and 56.2% of the school population was enrolled in private (aided and unaided) schools.

In 2021, there were 178 schools providing secondary education, with 170 on the Island of Mauritius and 8 in Rodrigues. State-administered schools numbered

69, while the other 109 schools were private aided and non-aided schools (Ministry of Education and Human Resource, 2025b, p. 5).

It should be noted that Section 40 of the *Education Act* provides that

...in every school in receipt of public funds, the curriculum, the syllabus for each course of study, the subjects of instruction and the method of teaching shall be such as the Minister (Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology) shall from time to time approve. (Government of Mauritius, 1957)

This implies that private schools which do not receive any grant or aid in Mauritius are free to determine their own syllabus and curriculum.

School Discipline in Mauritius

The Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology administers and regulates the education system of Mauritius and can make regulations regarding discipline in schools as well as the methods of enforcement of said discipline (Government of Mauritius, 1957). The Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology can also make rules relating to the administration, management of and discipline in all Government Schools (Government of Mauritius, 1957).

Regulation 34 of the Education Regulations 1957 provides that the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology can delegate some of his disciplinary powers:

- (1) The Principal of a Government or aided primary school, a Government central or secondary school, of the Government Secondary and Technical School and the Teachers' Training College may, with the approval of the Minister, and, in the case of an aided primary school, with the approval of the Manager, make such rules for the administration and discipline of the school as he may determine.
- (2) The principal may require his staff to perform such duties in the execution of these rules as he thinks fit and authorise them to inflict such punishments, other than corporal punishment, as he may determine for any misconduct or breach of the rules of which a pupil may be found guilty at any time and in any place.

In short, while the principal may make some of the rules regarding disciplinary action, much of the principal's disciplinary power depends upon sanctions that are handed down from the Minister of Education, even though such power is delegated. Nevertheless, the principal may choose from a wide range of potential sanctions when it comes to student discipline. Such an approach to discipline is like the zero-tolerance disciplinary models implemented in North America. For example, under the Safe Schools Act in Ontario, principals were asked by the

Ministry of Education to apply automatic and pre-determined sanctions such as suspensions and expulsions to a range of student (mis)behaviours regardless of mitigating circumstances (Muñiz, 2021). In this way, top-down approaches to student discipline are not unique to the context of Mauritius.

In terms of private secondary schools, the Private Secondary Education Authority (PSEA), a corporate body created under the Private Secondary Education Authority Act, is responsible for formulating appropriate policies, developing rules, issuing guidelines and directives, and setting standards and conditions for the discipline of students (Private Secondary Education Authority, 2025). These disciplinary powers include the suspension and the expulsion of students in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Suspension of Students in Mauritius

Maintaining discipline is a responsibility conferred upon the principal of a school. Regulation 2 of the Education Regulations 1957 defines a 'Principal' as the head of a school, whether called principal, rector, headmaster or otherwise. The Principal of a Government or Aided Private Primary School or a Government Secondary School has the power to take a wide range of disciplinary actions such as issuing a verbal reprimand, issuance of warnings or imposing a detention. However, more serious actions include the suspension of a student.

Regarding the suspension of students, Regulation 13 of the Education Regulations 1957 provides that:

- (1) (a) Where it appears to the Principal of a Government junior technical or secondary school or the Government Secondary and Technical School or a Government or aided primary school that the conduct, work or progress of a pupil is unsatisfactory, he may temporarily suspend a pupil require the responsible party of the pupil, by notice in writing, to withdraw him from the school within such period as may be specified in the notice.
(b) where the responsible party fails to withdraw the pupil within that period, the pupil shall, with the approval of the Minister, be expelled from the school.
- (2) In any case of serious misconduct, the Principal of a Government or aided primary school or the Government Secondary and Technical School or a Government junior technical school or a Government Secondary School, with the approval of the Minister, may suspend or expel a pupil, and no pupil who has been suspended shall be re-admitted to school before the expiry of the period of suspension unless the Minister in any special case otherwise directs.

In cases, where the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the pupil do not comply to the request of the principal to withdraw their child from school, the principal may have recourse to Regulation 13 that states '(b) where the responsible party fails to

withdraw the pupil within that period, the pupil shall, with the approval of the Minister, be expelled from the school' ([Government of Mauritius, 1957](#)).

In the case of a student's serious misconduct, according to Regulation 13(2), the school principal has the discretion to either suspend or expel the student. However, under no circumstances may a student be readmitted to the school prior to the period specified in the notice or unless directed by the Minister. As well, the number of days the student is to be suspended should not exceed five school days.

In December 2015, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, issued a Student Behaviour Policy to ensure a consistent approach across all schools in the management of indiscipline. Regarding the suspension of students, the Student Behaviour Policy specifies that a temporary suspension is only applicable in cases of gross or persistent serious misbehaviour provided that:

- a. The suspension has been recommended by the School Disciplinary Committee. This Committee consists of both school staff and students and is set up to support the school administration in maintaining discipline. It is usually called upon to enquire into cases of gross misbehaviour, serious incidents and persistent misconduct and make recommendations for action to the Head of School.
- b. The suspension period does not exceed 5 days;
- c. Provision is made for enabling a considered, positive resolution process and re-entry plan; and
- d. Parents are informed in writing of the reasons for the suspension as well as conditions attached to the period of suspension and those to be met prior to the student's re-entry to school. ([Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2015](#), pp. 10–11)

As noted, under this policy, principals are allowed to suspend a student in cases of gross misbehaviour, serious incidents and persistent misconduct with the recommendation of the School Disciplinary Committee. It is worth noting that the *Education Act*, Education Regulations 1957 and the Student Behaviour Policy do not provide a definition of a 'serious misbehaviour/misconduct'. Rather, applying a definition is left to the discretion of the School Disciplinary Committee, Head Master and the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. The parents or the guardian of the student are informed in writing of the reason(s) for the suspension and the conditions during the suspension period that need to be met prior to the student being re-admitted to a school. The number of days the student is suspended remains unchanged under the policy. However, the Minister has the sole discretion as to whether the student is to be suspended or not.

The Student Behaviour Policy, which was published after the Education Regulation 1957, highlights the fact, as mentioned previously, that the suspension of a student must be used in exceptional circumstances and under strict conditions. Furthermore, the punishment must be recommended by the School

Disciplinary Committee and must be approved by the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. The Minister can, even in certain circumstances, re-admit the students before the expiry of the period of suspension.

Turning to non-aided primary and private secondary schools, the law is silent regarding the suspension of students. This disciplinary sanction including the suspension of a student is provided in most non-aided primary and private secondary schools' rules and regulations. The relationship between a student, represented by their legal guardians, and the school is governed by the law of contract. The parents as well as the child are deemed to have agreed to the applicable Rules and Regulations of the school. However, these private schools are expected to have procedural rules in place to ensure students receive fair treatments before being suspended.

Expulsion of Students in Mauritius

Regarding the expulsion of students, the Student Behaviour Policy provides three consecutive categories: official final warning, expulsion from school and permanent expulsion. In the case of a persistent breach or a series of serious disciplinary incidents, even after three periods of temporary suspension, the student may be issued a final warning. The case must be supported by objective evidence of the student's involvement in past discipline incidents and the failure of adequate behaviour resolution measures. Any serious recurrence would entail a permanent expulsion from the school.

The category identified as 'expulsion from school' is a more extreme censure. In this case, when there is a persistent breach or serious discipline incident(s) after an official final warning has been issued, parents will be notified and the case will be examined by a School Discipline Advisory Panel at the level of the Zone/PSSA which may facilitate admission to another school, especially in the case of students who are of compulsory school age. A student may benefit from this opportunity only once during their secondary schooling. The third category, permanent expulsion, is the ultimate sanction to be considered when serious acts of discipline are reported after expulsion from one school and admission to another. In accordance with the Education Regulations and the PSSA Regulations, no student should be expelled from any school without the authorization of the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.

There is a lengthy procedure in place before a student can be permanently expelled from a Government or Aided Primary School and Government Secondary School. This sanction may only be contemplated in the case of persistent and serious acts of indiscipline after three periods of temporary suspensions and after an official warning has been issued. Even if the student is expelled, they have a final opportunity to redeem themselves by obtaining admission to another school. It is only after committing serious acts of discipline in their new school that the student may be permanently expelled and this is also subject to the approval of the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. Even if a student is permanently expelled from a Government or Aided