Introduction: The Supreme Court’s Imprint

Schools have long been required to provide procedural due process (PDP) protections to students who are permanently expelled from school or suspended for more than 10 days. However, these protections were not necessarily provided to students being suspended for less than 10 days.

This changed when, in its 1975 ruling on Goss v. Lopez, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students had a right to due process protections under the U.S. Constitution for out-of-school suspensions that were less than 10 days.

These due process protections require:

- Oral or written notice of the charges against the student
- If the student denies the charges, an informal hearing, i.e., an explanation of the evidence and an opportunity for the student to give his side of the story.

A recent study by Perry Zirkel and Mark Covelle examined state laws in the wake of the Goss decision. In addition to the notice and hearing requirements spelled out in Goss, Zirkel and Covelle compiled state policies that were not explicitly required by Goss, placing them in the following categories:

- Notice rights
- Hearing Rights
- Additional levels
- Other procedural safeguards.

This ECS Highlights document summarizes that study.

What do State Policies Look Like After the Goss Decision?

While meeting the minimums set out in Goss is required, states are free to add additional protections that go above and beyond those mandated in Goss. The Zirkel-Covelle study provides a systematic survey of state laws for what can be called “Goss suspensions” — those of 10 days or less — in terms of their procedural requirements. Entries in the table on the following page differentiate between codifications and expansions of the Goss requirements.

Table Summary

Explicit codifications of the Goss minimums are relatively infrequent. In the table, those provisions are designated by a highlighted entry in the Notice and Hearing columns. Non-highlighted entries extend the due process requirements beyond those mandated in Goss.

Notice: The most common procedural additions to Goss are notification to the parent and to the superintendent. Several of these state laws add specifications for the contents, timing and form of this notification.
Hearing and Other Hearing Rights: The most common procedural additions to Goss are unconditional opportunity for the student’s side of the story, accompanied in approximately half of these states with a corresponding unqualified school official’s obligation — without the triggering condition of the student denying the charges — to explain the evidence. Less frequently, state laws provide the right to appeal to the superintendent, the board or both.

Additional Levels: The most significant expansion of Goss rights includes limiting the application of Goss to a substantially lower ceiling than 10 days and adding stronger PDP rights for the remaining period of suspension.

A Note to Readers:
Accurately reflecting diverse policies from all 50 states in a table can lead to simplification of policies, which may mask important nuances that readers may wish to know about. For that reason, readers are encouraged to reference the endnotes immediately following the table. Endnotes are reproduced in their original form from the law article.

### State Policies

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Kyle Zinth, policy analyst in the ECS Information Clearinghouse, prepared this ECS Highlights document. E-mail Kyle at kzinth@ecs.org.

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Helping State Leaders Shape Education Policy

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1 Alabama regulations define suspensions but do not specify the prerequisite procedural requirements, inferably leaving such matters to local school board policy. ALA. ADMIN. CODE r. 290-3-1-.02 (2008). The authors acknowledge with appreciation the assistance of Doris McQuiddy for confirmation that Alabama school districts develop their policies and procedures for suspensions as well as expulsions. E-mail from Doris McQuiddy, Educ. Specialist, Ala. Dep’t of Educ., to Perry A. Zirkel, Professor of Educ. and Law, Lehigh Univ. (May 29, 2008) (on file with second author).

2 ALASKA ADMIN. CODE tit. 4, § 06.060 (2009)

3 Except for the implied notice requirement, see infra note 55, and the possible additional rights, see infra notes 56, 57, the relevant state law defers to school boards ―in consultation with the teachers and parents of the school district‖ to "prescribe rules for the discipline, suspension and expulsion of pupils," ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-843(B) (2008). However, the law sets the procedural minimum only for suspensions of more than ten days and merely mandates that the rules be "consistent with the constitutional rights of pupils." Id

4 In requiring the superintendent to notify the school board within five days of all suspensions, the legislation implies that the suspending administrator provide notice to the superintendent. ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-843(K)

5 Quaere whether the connected requirement that the suspension be for “good cause” implies a right of appeal to the school board. Id

6 The related requirement for access to specified board proceedings, see infra note 57, does not necessarily add to this arguable right; if the legislature intended that any board proceeding for suspensions be discretionary—in contrast with the explicit right to a board hearing for expulsions—the access right is only conditional, ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-843(G)
For suspensions and expulsions, the legislation also accords the student, parents, and their legal counsel the right to attend and have access to the minutes or recording of “any executive session pertaining to the proposed disciplinary action.” ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-843(H).

The Arkansas legislation only allows for appeals to the school board if the superintendent initiates the suspension. Id. § 6-18-507(c)(2).

In addition to requiring written notice to the parents regarding the suspension decision, at the time of the decision, the suspending administrator must make reasonable efforts to contact the parents in person or by telephone. Id. § 48911(d).

The administrator must have an informal conference with not only the student, but also “whenever practicable, [with] the teacher, supervisor, or [referring] school employee.” Id. § 48911(b).

Ibid

Quaere whether the requirement that the suspending administrator report the suspension—with the reason for the suspension—to the superintendent or board implies a right of appeal to said level. Id. § 48911(e).

California law treats suspensions of six days or more as expulsions, which separately have more formal rights, including, inter alia, written notice and a hearing with right to counsel. Id. §§ 48911(a), 48918.

COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-33-105 (2008)

The Colorado legislation requires, as a prerequisite to the suspended student’s readmission, a meeting between the student, parent, and suspending administrator to discuss the “need to develop a remedial discipline plan for the pupil in an effort to prevent further disciplinary action.” Id. § 22-33-105(3)(b)(II).

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Connecticut law requires providing the student with the reasons for the suspension, which equate more with notice of the charges than an explanation of the evidence. Id. § 10-233c(a).

The state law provides that “no pupil shall be suspended more than ten times or a total of fifty days in one school year, whichever results in fewer days of exclusion, unless such pupil is granted a formal hearing.” Id. Additionally and more significantly, an amendment to said statute, effective July 1, 2008, requires that schools replace out-of-school suspensions—as contrasted with expulsions—with in-school suspensions, except when the administration determines that the student “poses such a danger to persons or property or such a disruption of the educational process” to justify out-of-school suspension. Id. § 10-233c(g).

The state education agency, pursuant to the directive in the amendment, has issued guidelines for this determination. CONN. STATE DEPT OF EDUC., GUIDELINES FOR IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS 1 (2008), available at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/In_School_Suspension_Guidance.pdf. Finally and peripherally, a Connecticut regulation requires “prompt referral to a planning and placement team of all children who have been suspended repeatedly.” CONN. AGENCIES REGS. § 10-76d-7 (2008).

The state law provides that “no pupil shall be suspended more than ten times or a total of fifty days in one school year, whichever results in fewer days of exclusion, unless such pupil is granted a formal hearing.” Id. § 10-233c(a).

Delaware does not have relevant legislation or regulations. More specifically, “Delaware has not enacted any statutory or regulatory provisions which either repeat or add to the Goss notice and hearing requirements.” E-mail from Mary L. Cooke, Deputy Atty Gen., Del., to Perry A. Zirkel, Professor of Educ. and Law, Lehigh Univ. (June 13, 2008) (on file with second author). Previously, the state education department issued non-binding guidelines that recommended oral notice and a written decision that included the charges, evidence, sanction, and right to internal appeal, first to the superintendent, then to the board. WILLIAM B. KEENE, DEL. STATE DEPT OF PUB. INSTRUCTION, GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT POLICIES ON STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES 10–11 (1988), available at http://www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/students_family/climate/files/climate_Codes_Conduct_1992.pdf. However, recently the state education department issued its intention, see 12 Del. Reg. Regs. 219 (Aug. 1, 2008), available at http://regulations.delaware.gov/register/august2008/final/12%20DE%20Reg%202019%2008-01-08.pdf, to amend title 14, section 605 of the Delaware Administrative Code, which requires school districts to keep local rights and responsibilities policies on file with the state department of education, so as to delete reference to these guidelines, DEL. ADMIN. CODE tit. 14, § 605 (2008), available at http://regulations.

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Florida’s legislation requires the suspending administrator to make “a good faith effort to immediately inform a student’s parent by telephone” and to report the suspension and its reason “within 24 hours to the student’s parent by United States mail.” Id. This requirement also applies to school bus suspensions. Id.

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Florida also requires the principal or the principal’s designee to make a “good faith effort . . . to employ parental assistance or other alternative measures prior to suspension, except in the case of emergency or disruptive conditions which require immediate suspension or in the case of a serious breach of conduct as defined by rules of the district school board.” Id. Additionally, Florida, by regulation, has special provisions for suspension of students who are prosecuted for a felony off school property that has an adverse impact on the educational process. FLA. ADMIN. CODE ANN. r. 6A-1.0956 (2008).

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GA. CODE ANN. § 20-2-738 (2005). In line with its specific provisions, see infra notes 78–79, this statute authorizes the principal or the principal’s designee to suspend the student “consistent with any applicable procedural requirements of the Constitutions of the United States and this state and after considering the use of any appropriate student support services,” GA. CODE ANN. § 20-2-738(e)(1).

The written notice and other Goss-plus protections are a requisite step after the teacher’s removal of the student from class. GA. CODE ANN. §§ 20-2-738(b), (c). Arguably, these minimums would seem to implicitly apply when an administrator removes the student from school. See id. § 20-2-738(e)(2).

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Ibid
In addition to the notable right of a teacher to remove a child from the classroom, the Georgia statute also establishes a placement review committee that serves as an intermediate step between the teacher’s removal of the student and the exercise of the principal’s suspension options. Id. §§ 20-2-738(d), (e).


The rules require the school to provide the parents with initial notice by telephone “if feasible” and, upon completion of the required investigation, written notice. Id. § 8-19-8(d). In addition, the rules require the principal “to attempt to confirm the[written] notice by telephoning the parent.” Id. Although unclear whether it repeats the first step or serves as an intermediate step, the rules also require the principal to notify the parents “[u]pon preliminary investigation and findings.” Id. § 8-19-8(a).

The required elements of the written parental notice include a statement “[t]hat the parent may request a conference with the principal or designee,” thus providing the parent with at least an equivalent right. Id. § 8-19-8(d)(4).

Hawaii’s rules trigger the more formal procedural protections of expulsion upon the accumulation of eleven or more days of suspension. Id. § 8-19-8(c).

For the Goss-type notice and hearing for the student, the rules require the principal to request the parents to participate “where the student is unable to understand the seriousness of the charges, the nature of the proceedings, and consequences thereof, or is of such age, intelligence or experience as to make meaningful discussion difficult.”Id. § 8-19-8(b). More generally, the rules require counseling of the student in connection with each suspension. Id. § 8-19-6(g).


“The board of trustees [of the school district] shall be notified of any temporary suspensions, the reasons there for, and the response, if any, thereto.” § 33-205.

The required “informal hearing” specifies that the principal must provide the student with the reasons for the suspension, which—corresponding more closely to the charges—do not necessarily equate fully with an explanation of the evidence. Id.

Similarly, the requirement is “the opportunity to challenge [the] reasons.” Id.

At any one of the following applicable limits, the more formal notice and hearing requirements for an expulsion apply: (1) the principal suspends the student for more than five days; (2) the superintendent extends the suspension by an additional ten days; or (3) the school board extends the suspension by an additional five days because the suspended student poses a risk to the health, welfare, or safety of other pupils. Id.

ILL. COMP. STAT. § 5/10-22.6(b) (West 2006).

The notice to the student’s parents or guardian must include “a full statement of the reasons for [] suspension and a notice of their right to [school board] review.” Id.

As in Idaho, see supra note 91, this right appears to be partial, based on the connected notice-of-reasons requirement, § 5/10-22.6(b).

If the parents exercise this required appeals opportunity, then they have the right to appear and participate at the school board review. § 5/10-22.6(b).

IND. CODE ANN. § 20-33-8-18(b) (West 2008)


This procedural requirement is the only one specified in the Iowa legislation and—along with the teacher’s, principal’s, and superintendent’s authorities for suspensions—the requirement is conditioned upon the school board’s delegation. Id.

KAN. STAT. ANN. § 72-8902(b), (c) (2002).

In addition to the immediate oral notice, the legislation requires that written notice, including the reasons for suspension, be given to the student and the student’s parent within twenty-four hours. Id. § 72-8902(c).


Id. § 17:416(C).

The Maine legislation merely requires “proper investigation of a student’s behavior” and “due process proceedings” for student suspensions and expulsions. ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 20-A, § 1001(9) (2008).

The Maryland legislation only provides, in pertinent part, that “[t]he student or the student’s parent or guardian promptly shall be given a conference with the principal and any other appropriate personnel during the suspension period.” MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-305(a)(2) (LexisNexis 2006).

Id.

Id.

Id.

Id.

Id.

The Maryland regulations provide a narrowly circumscribed right to appeal to the State Board of Education. MD. CODE REGS. 13A.01.05.05 (2009).

The Massachusetts legislation generally requires each school district to have policies that provide “disciplinary proceedings, including procedures assuring due process” and “standards and procedures for suspension and expulsion of students.” MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. ch. 71, § 37H (West 1996).

This legislation only specifies procedural prerequisites in cases of student felonies. Id. § 37H1/2.

Michigan’s legislation authorizes the school board and administrators to suspend students for “gross misdemeanor or persistent disobedience,” but it does not specify any relevant procedural prerequisites. MICH. COMP. LAWS ANN. § 380.1311(1) (West 2005 & Supp. 2008). Michigan has a separate statute that authorizes teachers to suspend students from a class, subject, or activity. Id. §
The school must provide written notice to the student and the parent within twenty-four hours of the suspension. Id. § 79-265(b)(2). Prior to the end of the suspension, the principal must make “a reasonable effort to hold a conference with the parent or guardian before or at the time the student returns to school.” Id. § 79-265(b)(5).


Montana’s regulations require that each school “maintain a record of any disciplinary action that is educationally related [including suspensions], with explanation, taken against the student.” MONT. ADMIN. R. 10.55.910 (2007).

The legislation clarifies that the suspending administrator “is not required to divulge the identity of informants, although (s)he should not withhold such information without good cause.” Id.
New York provides the student and parents with the right, upon request, to “an informal conference with the principal at which the pupil and/or person in parental relation shall be authorized to present the pupil’s version of the event and to ask questions of the complaining witnesses.” Id. § 3214(3)(b)(1).

New York law treats suspensions of six days or more effectively as expulsions, according expelled students the rights, inter alia, of “reasonable notice,” legal representation, and cross-examination. Id. § 3214(3)(c)(1). New York does not have any subsequent, differentiating level for removals of more than ten days.

The legislation provides students with the opportunity to appear at an informal hearing to “challenge the reason for the intended suspension or otherwise to explain [their] actions.” Id. § 3313.661(A).

The regulations provide the school board, not the parent, with the right of final review, and this is seemingly only when the “executive officer of the school district or designated representative” makes the suspension decision. Id. 22 PA. CODE §§ 12.6(b), 12.8(b), (c) (2009).

Pennsylvania’s regulations require providing the student with the reasons for the suspension, which equate more with notice of the charges than an explanation of the evidence. Id. § 12.6(b).

For suspensions of four to ten days, the regulations require providing an informal conference among the student, the parent, and the principal within the first five days of the suspension. Id. §§ 12.6(b)(1)(iv), 12.8(c). This “hearing” must include the right to question witnesses present and to produce witnesses on the student’s behalf. Id. § 12.8(c). The regulations provide a further, more formal level of hearing for removals of more than ten days. Id. § 12.6(b).

The Oklahoma legislation requires districts to develop policies, including procedures, for student suspensions, but the only specified procedure is the right of appeal to a district panel. OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 70, § 24-101.3 (West 2005 & Supp. 2009).

Districts must create a policy that determines an appeals panel for suspension and expulsions. Id. § 24-101.3(A). The panel may be a committee made up of teachers, district administrators, or both, or the panel may be the district board of education. Id. § 24-101.3(B)(1).


This notice must include “the conditions for reinstatement, and appeal procedures, where applicable.” Id.

Oregon’s regulations require “specification of [the] charges,” which does not appear to equate fully to an explanation of the evidence. Id. § 3313.661(A).

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Rhode Island’s “safe school” legislation authorizes the school committee, or a school principal as designated by the school committee, to suspend “disruptive” students, but it does not specify the procedural requirements beyond a multistep right of appeal. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 16-2-17(a), (b) (1996). The legislation includes a definition of “disruptive.” Id. § 16-2-17(a).

When the delegated school principal issues the suspension, the statute is not clear whether there is a right to appeal to the board. It may be alternatively argued that the principal and the board for such action are effectively the same or that the specified higher levels imply full exhaustion from the principal to the board. Id. § 16-2-17(b).

The Rhode Island legislation provides the successive appellate rights to “the [state] commissioner of elementary and secondary education,” “the [state] board of regents for elementary and secondary education,” and “the family court for the county in which the school is located.” § 16-2-17(b).


Written notice must include the reasons for the suspension and provide the parents with an opportunity for a meeting with the administrator within three days of the suspension. Id.

The aforementioned meeting with the administrator must be exhausted to trigger this right to appeal to “the board of trustees or to its authorized agent.” Id.


After stating that school boards “may authorize the summary suspension of pupils by principals of schools for not more than ten school days,” South Dakota’s legislation then appears to give the superintendent, not the parent, the right of review, specifically providing: “Any suspension by a principal shall be immediately reported to the superintendent who may revoke the suspension at any time.” Id. § 13-32-4.2.

TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-3401(a) to (c) (2002 & Supp. 2007).

The required notice to both the parents and the superintendent must include “[t]he cause for the suspension” and “[t]he conditions for readmission, which may include, at the request of either party, a meeting of the parent or guardian, student and principal.” Id. § 49-6-3401(c).

The required information is limited to “the nature of the student’s misconduct.” Id.

As a prerequisite to suspension, the legislation additionally requires the suspending administrator’s affirmative act of questioning the student. Id.

The legislation provides as follows: “If the suspension is for more than five (5) days, the principal shall develop and implement a plan for improving the behavior which shall be made available for review by the [superintendent] upon request.” Id.

TEXAS EDUC. CODE ANN. §§ 37.001, 37.005, 37.009 (Vernon 2006). We acknowledge with appreciation the assistance of attorney Christopher Borreca in confirming that Texas legislation focuses its procedural protections on suspensions of more than two days. E-mail from Chris Borreca, Atty., Houston Office of Thompson &Horton, LLP, to Perry A. Zirkel, Professor of Educ. and Law, Lehigh Univ. (May 28, 2008) (on file with second author).
Texas’s legislation requires the school board to “address the notification of a student’s parent or guardian of a violation of the student code of conduct committed by the student that results in suspension.” TEXAS EDUC. CODE ANN. § 37.001(a)(6) (Vernon 2006).

The legislation leaves the right of appeal within the discretion of the district via its policy. Id. § 37.009(a).

For suspensions of three to ten days, Texas legislation provides: [T]he principal or other appropriate administrator shall schedule a conference among the principal or other appropriate administrator, a parent or guardian of the student, the teacher removing the student from class, if any, and the student. At the conference, the student is entitled to written or oral notice of the reasons for the removal, an explanation of the basis for the removal, and an opportunity to respond to the reasons for the removal. The student may not be returned to the regular classroom pending the conference.

Utah’s legislation delegates suspension policies to school boards “consistent with due process and other provisions of law,” with the only specifically required procedure being notice to the custodial parent. UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A-11-903 (2006 & Supp. 2008).

Additionally, the legislation requires notice to the noncustodial parent upon written request from such parent. Id. § 53A-11-903(1)(b)(i).

Vermont legislation simply provides “standard due process procedures for suspension and expulsion of a student.” VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 16, § 1161a(a)(3) (2004). The only exception is the specific requirement that the school’s discipline plan include procedures for “notifying parents of student misconduct.” Id. § 1161a(a)(3).


Washington’s regulations require that the notice also include an explanation of “the corrective action or punishment which may be imposed.” Id. § 392-400-250.

The regulations additionally provide that “[a]ny student, parent, or guardian who is aggrieved by the imposition of [a short-term suspension] shall have the right to an informal conference with the building principal or his or her designee for the purpose of resolving the grievance.” Id. § 392-400-240; see also id. § 392-400-245 (referring to short-term suspensions).

The student or parent may appeal successively to the principal, the superintendent, and then the school board. § 392-400-240.

The regulations in one part separate suspensions into those for one day and those for more than one day—presumably two to ten days—with the only distinction appearing to be with regard to the parent’s right to notice and an informal conference. Id. § 392-400-250(2). Yet, the prefatory part of the same regulation seems to provide these rights, by cross-reference, for suspensions of one to ten days generally. See § 392-400-250.

The regulations condition suspensions on “a general rule”: “[N]o student shall be suspended unless another form of corrective action or punishment reasonably calculated to modify [the student’s] conduct has previously been imposed upon the student as a consequence of misconduct of the same nature.” Id. § 392-400-245(2). This requirement has a provision for exceptional circumstances, which includes the school district’s consultation with an ad hoc citizens committee. Id. The regulations also limit the total number of days a student may be suspended based on age: students in kindergarten through grade four may miss no more than ten days per semester or trimester, while students in grades five and above may miss no more than fifteen days per semester or trimester. Id. § 392-400-245(4) to (5). Finally, the regulations expressly permit school boards to establish one or more “student disciplinary boards composed of students, teachers, administrators, or parents, or any combination thereof.” Id. § 392-400-220.

VA. CODE ANN. § 18A-5-1a(d) (LexisNexis 2007).

The legislation specifically provides that the parent “shall be given telephonic notice, if possible, of this informal hearing, which notice shall briefly state the grounds for suspension.” Id. The legislation also requires that written notice be sent to the parent on the same day the suspension was decided upon “by regular United States mail.” Id.

The legislation additionally requires that the written notice be provided to “the county superintendent and to the faculty senate of the school.” Id.

Not appearing to distinguish procedurally between suspensions of one to ten days and expulsions or other removals beyond ten consecutive days, the legislation provides for a board hearing with the various associated more formal protections, including the right to counsel. Id. § 18A-5-1a(f). In the case of a suspension, this proceeding is inferably by way of an appeal. Id.

WIS. STAT. ANN. § 120.13(1) (West 2004).

The requirement for parental notice when a teacher removes the student from class suggests that the same requirement exists when a student is suspended from school. Id. § 120.13(1)(a)(4).

The required information is “the reason for the proposed suspension,” which does not equate fully with an explanation of the evidence. Id. § 120.13(1)(b)(3).

The legislation limits suspensions to no more than five days for certain offenses, but it does not specify additional procedural prerequisites until the expulsion stage. Id. § 120.13(1)(b)(2).

WYO. STAT. ANN. § 21-4-305 (2007)