

**7th Grade Argumentative/Informational ‘On-Demand’  
Assessment Post-Writing Prompt**

Note

- During ‘on-demand’ assessments students should be at their regular writing seats and supplied with paper. Students should also have access to additional pages if needed.
- Teachers can post the prompt and read it aloud.
- Students independently read the passage.
- Give students 50 minutes to write. (One class period)
- Do **not** give the students a checklist during the pre-test, **only** during post-test.

Argumentative/Informational Writing Prompt

After reading the passage, *Instead of suspending students who misbehave, L.A. schools say “let’s talk”*, by Associated Press, answer the following question.

***Are suspensions a good way to correct student behaviors?***

In your writing, write your argument and convince your readers by telling them why you feel this way. Use everything you know about argument writing--including letter writing, review writing, and essay writing to make this your best argument writing.

You will have only 50 minutes to write, so you will need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting.

In your writing, make sure you:

- write an introduction.
- state your claim.
- give reasons and evidence.
- organize your writing.
- acknowledge counterclaims.
- use transition words.
- write a conclusion.”

# Instead of suspending students who misbehave, L.A. schools say "let's talk"

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.25.15



In this photo taken Dec. 15, 2014, high school students attend a circle session at restorative justice class at the Augustus F. Hawkins High School in Los Angeles. At Los Angeles Unified School District, the suspension rate has dropped from 8 percent in 2008 to 1.5 percent last school year. Photo: AP/Damian Dovarganes

LOS ANGELES — Over the last three years, Marcquees Banks has been taken out of class twice for getting into fights with other students. He was even sent to another school.

The third time he got into a scuffle, something different happened: A counselor at Augustus Hawkins High School in South Los Angeles pulled Banks and the other teen aside and told them they needed to talk.

## Seated Face To Face

With the teens seated face to face, Joseph Luciani asked them to explain why they had fought and how they felt.

The school's new approach to dealing with unruly students is known as restorative justice. It focuses less on suspensions, and more on students working out their differences with counselors.

"I realized we had a lot of similarities," said Banks, 17, talking of the student he had been fighting with. Banks said his father is involved in a gang and his mother is jobless.

At Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest, the shift has been major. In the 2006-2007 school year, the district's students were given a total of 74,765 days of suspension. Last year, they received just 8,351, an 89-percent decrease.

## **Punishment or Counseling?**

Across the nation there has been a push to roll back tough policies put in place after a deadly shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999. After that incident, many U.S. schools added zero tolerance policies that require harsh punishment for even minor misbehavior.

In a letter to school districts last year, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan urged schools to move away from punishing students by removing them from class.

In Los Angeles, the school board has announced that by 2020 every school must use restorative justice to deal with disciplinary problems. Restorative justice is now being used in a number of other large school districts.

The new approach cultivates communication between teachers and students. Each week they gather in circles to discuss concerns. One-on-one "harm circles" are formed between students, parents and counselors when conflicts arise.

## **A Case Study**

Los Angeles, in particular, will be a case study showing just how well the approach works.

One of the biggest debates concerning restorative justice is over how to measure success.

Looking at suspension rates is one way, said Howard Zehr, who has been studying restorative justice since the 1970s. Seeing how well children come to understand each other is another.

Critics fear that forcing schools to reduce suspensions could make teachers afraid to suspend anyone, no matter what they do.

"I worry about it going to the other extreme," said education expert Michael Petrilli. He said he fears "a situation in which there's very few or zero suspensions" and "schools become unruly places."

## **Restorative Justice Training**

Augustus Hawkins High School was opened in 2012, in a poor and rough neighborhood with a lot of gang activity.

Principal Claudia Rojas said she is determined to increase achievement levels at the school.

During her first year, Rojas and the schools two other principals issued a lot of suspensions. Then, they began looking for alternatives.

The school ended up hiring Joseph Luciani, who has studied conflict and peace-building. Over the summer, Luciani trained teachers how to use restorative justice in the classroom.

Teachers were instructed to first work on building trust by gathering students weekly and asking questions about their lives. Students talked about relatives who had been killed by gun violence or deported out of the U.S.

## **Suspensions Are Way Down**

When a student acted out, teachers would try to handle the situation in class, and if that failed to work, they would then send the student to a counselor. If students still continued to cause trouble, they would be sent to the principals and, if necessary, suspended.

At the program Rojas runs, suspensions dropped 44 percent the next year.

Other schools across the district have seen similar declines. One school has had just one suspension since 2012, while another has had none since 2010.

However, some also wonder: If students are not being suspended, how are they being held accountable? Zehr said the accountability comes in students having to take responsibility for their actions and the people they harmed by speaking with them directly.

## **A Future without Jail**

Some critics say that many schools will not be able to make restorative justice work. While schools like Augustus Hawkins have a full-time restorative justice counselor, most do not.

Teachers "feel they're just being told not to suspend or not expel," said Alex Caputo-Pearl, president of United Teachers Los Angeles, a group that represents teachers. She said that at schools with no counselors there is no "support network around them to get help for students or get help for themselves."

Now a junior, Banks said he has begun thinking differently about his future. He said he always thought he would end up in jail, because that is what others seemed to expect of him.

Now, he wants to be a counselor.

