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The Quiet Pipeline: Why Reversing School Discipline Is a Public-Safety Issue

When school-level discipline is overturned from above and teachers are pulled off the floor for protecting children, we are not just ‘softening’ the system – we are quietly ensuring that the antisocial behavior and societal ills that have crippled our island will continue to manifest well into the next generation.

The problem of teacher disempowerment is no longer anecdotal; it is documented.

The Ministry of Education itself has acknowledged the seriousness of school safety, launching a system-wide review following violent incidents at CedarBridge Academy in March 2025 and a February 2025 incident at Sandys Secondary Middle School, after which a teacher publicly stated that neither staff nor students felt safe.

Meanwhile, the Bermuda Union of Teachers has consistently flagged a system under strain: staffing shortages, rising burnout, and the erosion of frontline support. There has been ongoing miscommunication and ignoring of teacher input as well. Teachers have been clear: their voices must be heard directly, not filtered through Ministry spin.

None of this exists in a vacuum. Bermuda’s school system has a rulebook – one that is explicit.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Ministry of Education and this Union affirms that every teacher has the right to a safe and healthy workplace, and that the Ministry must implement policies to ensure the same. The Policy & Procedures Manual reinforces the Government’s legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1982 to protect both employees and students from harm. The Code of Conduct requires students to respect the safety of others and prohibits violence, weapons, and intimidation.

Most importantly, the Code does not leave consequences to interpretation. It sets out clear, well measured responses – including suspension and police referral for serious incidents. These are not optional.

Under the Education Act 1996 and the Code of Conduct, the principal is the authority responsible for discipline at the school level. Suspensions are issued by school leadership, can be extended by the Commissioner of Education, and may ultimately be appealed to the Minister – in that order.

That chain matters. It is designed to ensure fairness, due process, and consistency.

But when disciplinary decisions are reversed informally – when a consequence applied by a principal is undone after a direct appeal to the Department or the Minister – that chain is effectively bypassed.

The result is not compassion. It is inconsistency. It is confusion. And, eventually, it is anarchy.

This approach to school level discipline tells students, parents, and teachers that the published rules are conditional – that outcomes depend not on conduct, but on access. It undermines the Code's own guarantee of due process. It raises legitimate questions under the Ministerial Code of Conduct, which warns against both real and perceived conflicts when ministers intervene in constituent matters. And it places the Government on uncertain legal ground when teachers, acting within their duties to protect students, are removed from classrooms as a result.

This is alarmingly visible in the increasing use of administrative leave.

Under the Collective Bargaining Agreement, administrative leave is intended for serious investigations, particularly those involving child protection under the Children Act 1998. It is not designed to be a reflexive response when a teacher intervenes to stop a fight or restrain a student to prevent harm to themselves and others.

Yet that is how it is being implemented by the Department, and experienced by the members of this Union.

When the adult who steps in is sent home, and the aggressor remains, the message is unmistakable: intervention carries risk. Over time, that creates a chilling effect. Teachers begin to calculate – consciously or not – whether stepping in is worth the professional exposure.

That is not a theoretical concern. It is a shift in behaviour already being felt in schools. A shift that threatens to heighten the wider societal ills we have been experiencing in Bermuda since the closing years of the previous millennium.

Bermuda's own National Violence Reduction Strategy makes the connection explicit.

It identifies middle school as the stage where antisocial behaviour takes root – where group dynamics form, where fights escalate, where weapons begin to appear, and where recruitment into gang structures can begin. By high school, those patterns solidify into affiliations tied to neighbourhoods, protection, and identity.

This is not speculation. It is the Government's own framework.

Now consider the chain in plain terms:

A student commits an offence → The Code of Conduct prescribes a consequence → The principal applies the consequence → The consequence is later reduced or removed through informal intervention.

What is learned?

Not just by that student – but by every student watching, every teacher in the building, and every parent hearing about it – is that rules are negotiable.

Multiply that lesson across years, across classrooms, across cohorts.

A child who learns at 12 that specific anti-social behaviors carry no consistent consequence does not arrive at 22 with a different understanding of accountability. The behaviour evolves. The context changes. The lesson remains.

We cannot spend public resources responding to violence in the community while simultaneously weakening the systems designed to prevent it in the classroom.

These are not separate conversations. They are salient points of the same conversation – separated only by time.

To be clear, this is not a call for harsher schools. It is a call for consistent ones.

Back the Code of Conduct. If your child is disciplined, follow the appeal process as written: principal, then commissioner, then minister. The structure exists to protect fairness for everyone.

Demand transparency. The Ministry should publish anonymized summaries of disciplinary appeals, outlining what occurred, the grounds for appeal, and consideration. Openness is not optional – it is already required by the standards governing public office.

Support teachers – administrative leave should be reserved for credible investigations, not used as a default response to pressure. A system that penalises protection will quickly find itself without protectors.

Connect the dots – publicly and often. When leaders speak about violence in the community, ask what is happening in the schools. Ask what consequences are being upheld, and which are being reversed.

Because the pipeline is not abstract. It is built, decision by decision, in real time.

This Union believes that it is still within our control to change the direction of this invidious pipeline.

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