Many students are unable to remain in school and receive adequate education because they are suspended or excluded for multiple days from school. An Act Relative to Students’ Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School can help alleviate the issues that school exclusions place on the school system by requiring that students who are expelled for more than ten days must be provided with educational services such as Saturday school, tutoring and alternative placement.

The Bill
Final Draft H00178: “An Act Relative to Student’s Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School”

Elevator Speech
Oh! Hello Representative [Name]. I’m so glad I ran into you because I know you agree that all our children deserve the right to access an adequate education. The future of Massachusetts is in jeopardy because of “the heavy handed zero-tolerance policy” in the case of school exclusion legislation. The current school exclusion legislation denies students equal opportunity to a sufficient education. I know that this matters to you and your constituents because the future of our communities is at stake—without ample education our children will never grow to meet their potential as responsible, law-abiding, contributing citizens. In 2001, 34% of districts and charter schools excluded students from school. The current proposed bill will allow students who are excluded to be provided with education services such as tutoring, alternative placement and/or Saturday school. With this reform we can help all our children succeed.

Do not leave our communities, your district, in danger of falling behind; help bring the School Exclusion Bill H00178 to the House floor for a vote. Speak to chairs of both the Senate and House Committee on Education in favor of An Act Relative to Student’s Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School, Bill H00178. Stand in solidarity with education.
Excerpt from Campaign Journals

Beneva

The first meeting I had this semester was actually impromptu and totally unexpected. I tutor for a program called LACE (Learning and Cultural Enrichment). The program brings children from the local middle school, on to campus, who are from families who have recently immigrated to America and attend English Language Learner courses. Most times these children come from disadvantaged homes and it shows in the classroom. The first time I met my tutee we sat and spoke while enjoying a milkshake. As we began to get acquainted and I encouraged her to open up and trust me, something she revealed struck me. Her story is one that applies to many students everywhere, who are suffering from heavy-handed disciplinary policies in schools where one size fits all and it’s easier to get excluded from school than it is to get an adequate education.

Jeanne is a student at Kennedy Middle School. She emigrated from Haiti with her family a few years back and is working hard in English Language Learner (ELL) courses to keep up with the other children. Jeanne struggles with bullying because of her accent, culture shock as she continues to adjust to new surroundings, and an immense amount pressure as she tries to be what she sees as “good enough.” However, Jeanne has also had a few run-ins with the disciplinary system. Jeanne described a sense of helplessness; “when people pick on me I fight back but only I get in trouble.” The school system does not account for all the other issues Jeanne deals with; they simply apply their universal punishments. Jeanne is a child who carries many burdens and needs a little extra help, but instead of being supported she is marginalized. Jeanne is not alone, many immigrant, and English Language Learner students are not given the ample amount of support they need and their fear and uneasiness translates to misbehavior and ultimately exclusion from school. Excluding children from school, who already struggle to stay at the average learning level and continue to fight and overcome their many structural barriers, only hurts them. In many ways, this meeting may have been the most compelling experience I had this semester. As the semester went on I met with legislators and different coalition members but this one meeting is still the one of most value. When advocating for a bill, meeting the people who are immediately affected by the legislation you are fighting for is moving and inspirational.

Update (July 2011)

The Massachusetts Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education is scheduled to hold a hearing on the bill in September.

For more information

Massachusetts Advocates for Children
www.massadvocates.org/resources-cls.php