

A LITERATURE REVIEW SYNTHESIS

Reclaiming the Architect's Desk

Teacher-Led Design for Non-Educator Policy:
Reforming School Discipline & Autonomy

RESEARCHER

Katie McElheny

INSTITUTION

National Louis
University

CIC 521

PRIMARY ADVISOR

Professor Martinez

The Delivery Driver vs. The Architect

The Delivery Driver Loop

How non-educator governance models policy today:

- **Top-Down Mandates:** Corporate boards pack schools with rigid standardization guidelines.
- **Compliance Checkboxes:** Administrative criteria treat teachers like robotic, script-reading entities.
- **Standardized Tracking:** Unique students are reduced to purely numerical points on a high-stakes dashboard.

Result: Intense student isolation & severe teacher attrition.

The Teacher-Architect Vision

The structural shift supported by literature:

- **Sovereign Restorative Design:** Teachers gain statutory control over curriculum and behavioral frameworks.
- **Decentralized Discretion:** Policy matches local adolescent development and cultural landscapes.
- **Active Liberated Spaces:** Classrooms shift from factory assembly lines into supportive human circles.

Result: High-agency classrooms and educator sustainability.

Literature Review Matrix

THEMES & FRAMEWORKS	Kovick & Reich 2006	Conra 2015	Battjes & Kaplan 2023	Darby 2021	Weber 2026	Rundell 2007
1. BUREAUCRATIC NON-EXPERTS	Distant accountability benchmarks completely ignore the complex, messy realities of K-12 classrooms. TOP-DOWN GAP	Standardized, high-level policies fail localized communities. Demands transdisciplinary, local designs. LOCAL ACTION	Federal mandates like the Gun-Free Schools Act enforce rigid, uniform "one-size-fits-all" rules. DISCIPLINE	Shows power shifting from teacher discretion to formal, highly centralized administrative boards. CENTRALIZATION	Top-down guidance lacks evidentiary support, creating a massive execution chasm in urban districts. ASPIRATION VOID	Critiques superficial metrics and institutional silos that inflate disciplinary referrals. SILO BARRIERS
2. THE FAILURE OF "ADEQUACY"	Settling for legal "adequacy" acts as a cop-out that locks wealthy districts into superior trajectories. ADEQUACY TRAP	Critiques the corporate "business model" that restricts innovation to rigid economic benchmarks. METRICS LOOP	Exclusionary metrics build hostile, prison-like spaces. Labels minority students as liabilities. EXCLUSION	Automated zero-tolerance systems systematically criminalize normal adolescent behaviors. PIPELINE BIAS	Exposes severe data manipulation and administrative pressure to hide suspensions. UNDERREPORTING	Replaces box-ticking with IDPs measuring student belonging, emotion, and active participation. TRUE PROGRESS
3. RECOVERING SOVEREIGNTY	Demands tying equity standards dynamically to the highest-performing districts to curb regressions. PEGGED EQUITY	Uses popular arts, popular theatre, and PAR to reposition youth and educators as knowledge creators. LIBERATION	State-level restorative legislative models require schools to swap punitive bans for supportive therapy. RESTORATION	Advocates legal overhauls to return behavioral control and matching discretion to school staff. STAFF AGENCY	Proves restorative programs only succeed when built on well-funded, structured adult authority. RULE ARCHITECTURE	Empowers practitioners to resolve systemic human tension via collaborative action research. CLINICAL INSIGHT

Theme #1: Bureaucratic Non-Experts

CENTRAL OVERLORDSHIP



Distant Policy Architects

The Reality: Non-educator policymakers at federal and state levels engineer curriculum parameters with zero context of K-12 realities.

Synthesis: Koski & Reich (2006) demonstrate that top-down formulas regular fail to address localized community landscapes.



Exclusionary Mandates

The Pipeline: Centralized boards shift focus from student rehabilitation to uniform, severe zero-tolerance discipline grids.

Synthesis: Battjes & Kaplan (2023) critique how uniform acts like the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 trickled down into non-expert severity.



Diminishing Local Autonomy

The Consequence: Classroom authority shifts from localized teachers to automated, corporate-driven state compliance committees.

Synthesis: Darby (2021) documents the heavy operational toll when state boards restrict school-level administrators.

The Bureaucracy

"When administrators strip authority away from practitioners, they second-guess critical choices from detached offices."

Aspiration vs. Evidence

Weber (2026) documents how top-down federal discipline initiatives dismantled structured adult authority in major urban school districts, basing guidelines on aspiration rather than local evidence.

This disconnection isolates teachers and traps them between unyielding legal parameters and the real, unpredictable human needs of their students.



Decentralizing Discipline

Moving from centralized judicial policies back to teacher-led, contextual classroom environments.

Theme #2: The Failure of "Adequacy"

THE COMPLIANCE TRAP

The Illusion of Standardized Progress

Traditional policy settles for educational "adequacy" (the absolute bare minimum) to fulfill bureaucratic checkboxes. This compliance mindset treats both teachers and children as cogs inside a giant, standard factory machine.

84%

Teacher Demoralization

National survey data highlights that 84% of teachers would not recommend the profession due to top-down administrative compliance constraints.

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM (2024)

1994

Zero-Tolerance Era

The initiation of federal high-stakes containment templates that transformed nurturing learning centers into rigid environments.

GUN-FREE SCHOOLS ACT

0%

Local Agility Impact

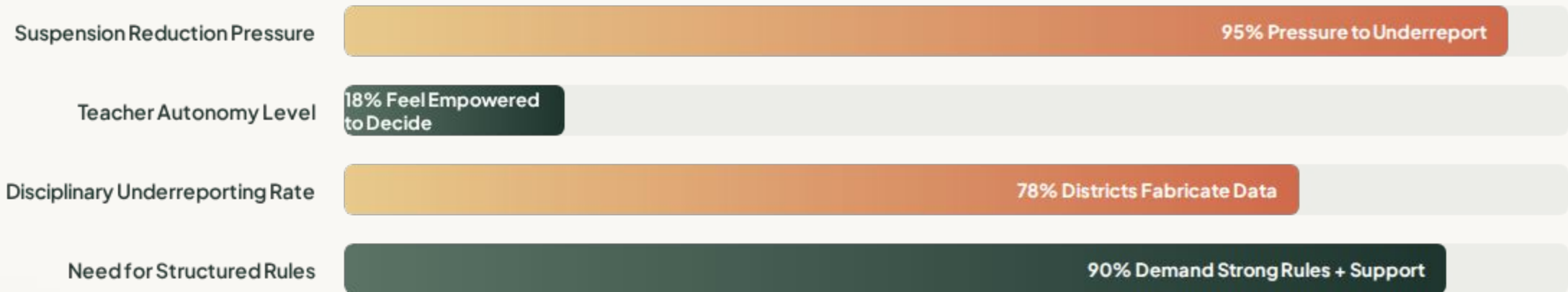
One-size-fits-all compliance scripts afford zero agility to honor distinct cultural dynamics or customized special needs.

KOSKI & REICH (2006)

Data Study: The Suspension Illusion

WEBER (2026) DATA

Weber (2026) exposes how national drops in school suspensions often reflect administrative pressure to meet high-level quotas and "make numbers look good on paper," leaving teachers with zero backing to manage disrupted learning.



Sovereign restorative structures fail unless supported by strong, fully funded infrastructure and adult authority.

THEME #3: RECOVERING SOVEREIGNTY



THE SOLDIER-ARCHITECT PARALLEL

Educational equity requires treating teachers as clinical experts, not passive executors. Collaborative action research empowers educators to resolve systemic conflicts without bureaucratic coercion.

Participatory Action Research

Restorative Juvenile Practices Act

Local Behavior Control

The Shift Toward Classroom Sovereignty

01

Central Overlordship

1994 Gun-Free Schools Act and subsequent state compliance rules strip local administrators of operational discretion.

02

Compliance Failures

Data underreporting pressure and artificial zero-tolerance metrics lead to high attrition and unchecked behavioral disruptions.

03

Legislative Pivot

State-level overhauls (like those in Michigan & Minnesota) begin legal mandates to replace suspensions with restorative designs.

04

The Reclaimed Desk

Active practitioners are codified into law as curriculum architects, backed by formal State-wide leadership tracks.

Reclaiming the professional desk is our only path forward.

"Transitioning educators from mere facilitators of high-level mandates into principal designers of strategy guarantees that classrooms remain sanctuaries for genuine intellectual rigor."



kmcelheny@nlu.edu



"New_Master
Research_Reclaiming the
Architect's Desk.pdf"



Chicago Campus, NLU