



## The Student Attendance Dilemma

After reflecting on the previous school year's low classroom attendance rates, a school district decided to take action to minimize students' time spent out of the classroom during the school day. The district designs the following "hallway and leaving" classroom consequence system for students leaving the classroom without permission:

**1st offense** - Negative point/deduction

**2nd offense** - Phone call home and parent contact/redirection

**3rd offense** - In-school suspension (ISS)

**4th offense** - Out of school suspension (OSS)

**>5 offenses** - Meeting between parent and school staff, resulting in a contract that could lead to expulsion if more offenses occur

*Spring semester:* Michael is in Mr. Smith's classroom. He has already walked out of class without permission 3 times this year, and knows that if he does it again, he will get an OSS. He is trying to work and stay focused, but the activity the teacher is having them do is too difficult for him. "Silently finish reading this article and answer the questions on the back," his teacher says sternly. Most of the class starts working, but Michael looks around to see if anyone is able to help him as he can't read the article. Mr. Smith catches him looking around, and tells Michael to stop copying his neighbors' work. Embarrassed that he was just called out in front of his classmates, Michael gets flustered and shouts at his teacher that he doesn't care.

Frustrated at this outburst, Mr. Smith states, "That's an inappropriate response; that is going to be a deduction. Silently complete your work or I will have to call home." Nervous about getting a parent phone call, Michael looks down at his work. He is still confused and gets even more flustered as he tries to skip around to only words he knows or can read. As time goes on in class, he gets more and more embarrassed because he doesn't know how to do his work. He attempts to raise his hand to ask for help.

"We've been working on the main idea all year. If you'd focus you'd be able to do it." Mr. Smith responds when he notices Michael's hand is raised.

"I'm confused! Can't you just help me? Isn't it your job to teach this to me!" Michael responds, irritated that he can't get help.

"That's another inappropriate response, I'm going to have to give you another deduction." Mr. Smith replies. Michael yells in frustration, and slams his pencil down on the

table, storming toward the door. Mr. Smith sees this and states, "If you walk out now, you're going to get suspended. I guess you don't even want to go to this school."



Michael, embarrassed in front of his peers, walks out and slams the door. He wanders the hallway trying to calm down when the school's security person, Ms. W, comes by and asks, "Michael, where are you supposed to be right now?" He ignores her and pushes past her. Ms. W tries to grab him by the arm to get him to calm down, but he doesn't like to be touched and shoves her off him. She falls to the ground, and now Michael knows he's in bigger trouble and he runs away down the hallway.

When he is found about 10 minutes later the principal immediately calls for a parent pick up. The principal meets with Michael and his mom and explains that he can't come back to school until he has an expulsion hearing due to shoving a staff member. As soon as they get home, Michael's mom immediately starts yelling at him. When he tries to argue his side she slaps him in the mouth and says, "When I want your opinion, I'll let you know. Shut your mouth until I say so."

2 days later, Michael's mom decides that based on the principal's statements in the meeting, she needs to pull him out of school to avoid an expulsion on his permanent record. She struggles to find a new school for Michael. He does not re-enroll in a school until the following fall, missing months of instruction.

**After reading the scenario, rank the characters from 1-6.**

1 = most responsible for Michael not being in school | 6 = least responsible

	<b>Individual Ranking</b>	<b>Group Ranking</b>
Michael's Mom		
Michael		
Mr. Smith		
Ms. W		
The Principal		
The School District		

*Written and edited by Teach For America Milwaukee Alumna and educators Amanda McGovern and Jenna Colacino, this activity was adapted from [The Drawbridge Exercise by Judith H. Katz. \(1978\).](#)*