

Recent Studies on School Discipline

Summarized here are studies that were done after 2014 on school discipline reform. This is not an all inclusive list, but believe it includes research findings representing the multi-sided views on school discipline reform. We have provided links to the studies so that you may read them for yourselves if you wish.

March 2018 – GAO Report, *Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities* – <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-258>

- Used National Civil Rights data from 2013-2014 – the most recent available.
- Conclusion: Disparities were widespread and persisted regardless of types of disciplinary action, level of school poverty, or type of public school attended.
- Reasons Postulated for Disparity: implicit bias; relationship of poverty and trauma to behavior;

March 2017 – Max Eden, Manhattan Institute Report, *School Discipline Reform and Disorder: Evidence from NYC Public Schools: 2012-16* – <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/school-discipline-reform-and-disorder-evidence-nyc-schools-10103.html>

- Success of school discipline reform should not be measured by reduction in the number of suspensions, but by the number of schools with an improved school climate.
- Comparing the effects of the Mayor Bloomberg discipline reform (school climate remained broadly unchanged) to the Mayor De Blasio reform (school climate deteriorated) as reflected in school climate surveys.
- Makes a case against reducing suspension; focuses on negative effects of disruptive students on student achievement (pp. 9-10).
- Evidence inconclusive that disparate rates of suspension involved racial bias and discrimination.

May 2017, Matt Barnum, The 74, “*School Discipline Revolution: How Policy and Rhetoric Outstrip Hard Evidence* – <https://www.the74million.org/article/the-school-discipline-revolution-how-policy-and-rhetoric-outstrip-hard-evidence/>

- Notes that Max Eden acknowledges that his analysis (see above) cannot show that a reduction in exclusionary discipline *caused* more negative school climates.
- Exclusionary discipline is tightly correlated with lower test scores and higher dropout rates and disproportionately affects blacks and special education students. But there is little convincing data showing that suspensions *cause* these negative effects.

- Evidence of the effects of suspension is correlational only; better research is necessary.

December 2017, Fordham University, Matthew Steinberg and Johanna Lacoé, “*The Academic and Behavior Consequences of Discipline Reform: Evidence from Philadelphia* –

<https://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/%2812.05%29%20The%20Academic%20and%20Behavioral%20Consequences%20of%20Discipline%20Policy%20Reform%20Evidence%20from%20Philadelphia.pdf>

- Suspensions are unlikely to benefit suspended students, but an equally important issue is whether the push to reduce the number of suspensions is harmful to the rule-abiding majority.
- A vast body of descriptive research has shown that students in traditionally disadvantaged subgroups are more likely to be suspended than other students. For example, African American students are four times as likely to be suspended as white students. Research suggests that underlying social factors such as poverty and exposure to neighborhood violence or principals’ perspectives on discipline (e.g., a more preventative approach to discipline versus a more exclusionary approach), may contribute to differences in suspensions by student race and ethnicity. But they do not fully explain these differences.
- Similarly, a vast body of correlation research has demonstrated that suspended students have lower grades and test scores, are less likely to be promoted to the next grade level, and to graduate from high school and are far more likely to wind up in the criminal justice system. Yet there is essentially no causal evidence on the effect that out-of-school suspensions have on the achievement and attendance of suspended students, due to the methodological challenges that are also present in the (far smaller) literature dealing with the effects of suspensions on peers.
- Schools that are struggling most with student misconduct – those that are lowest achieving and the most racially segregated – likely require more supports (such as PBIS) if they are to successfully implement discipline reforms without adversely affecting the majority of students who are not subject to behavioral consequences such as out-of-school suspension.

Winter 2017, Education Next, Matthew Steinberg and Johanna Lacoé, “*What Do We Know About School Discipline Reform*” – <https://www.educationnext.org/what-do-we-know-about-school-discipline-reform-suspensions-expulsions/>

- Excellent historical review of discipline reform. (only 10 pages)

- Research has well established that removing students from class has negative impacts on their academic achievement, and there's broad recognition that suspensions and expulsions do very little on their own to address the underlying issues that cause most students to misbehave. However, good evidence on potential alternatives is fairly thin, and the linkages between school discipline and the criminal justice system are also less clear than advocates tend to acknowledge. While there's a lot of energy to move forward, to do *something* about the glaring racial inequities, this same pressure threatens to produce policy changes that could inadvertently hurt other students, teachers, and schools. Tackling such deep structural inequities as segregation and resource allocation is likely necessary to really address school discipline disparities.
- The immediate challenge for school leaders is figuring out how to balance the harm a disruptive student would face from losing more class time with their responsibility to effectively teach the rest of the class. We already know that those students who arrive at school with the most serious challenges, those who need the most instructional support, are also among those who are likely to be suspended.
- Academics with the Civil Rights Project of UCLA say that softening disciplinary practices would be minimal and manageable, and that resolving unequal discipline is necessary to reduce the racial achievement gap. They point to the Denver Public Schools, a district that had more concerted efforts to reduce suspensions and expulsions. Researchers found that at the same time that Denver's punitive discipline went down, the district showed "a steady and substantial increase" in the percentage of students scoring proficient or higher in nearly every subject for six consecutive years. Another recent study found that the impact of Chicago shortening the length of suspensions for more serious misconduct from ten days to five did not seriously disrupt or harm other students.

September 2015 – University of Chicago, *Suspending Chicago Students: Differences in Discipline Practices Across Schools* – <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/suspending-chicagos-students-differences-discipline-practices-across-schools>

- Reviewing 2013-2014 discipline data after discipline reforms began in 2009.
- It is the concentration of many low-achieving students from high poverty neighborhoods that seem to increase the likelihood that a school will have high suspension rates.
- There are a contained number of schools that have particularly high rates of exclusionary discipline. These school serve students who begin the year the farthest behind academically and who come from vulnerable background - - the students most in need of a safe and supportive school environment.

- Shortening the length of suspensions has mixed consequences for schools - - better attendance but worse climate and no impact on test scores.

March 2018 – Matt Barnum, Chalkbeat.org, *When Chicago Cut Down on Suspensions, Students Saw Test Scores and Attendance Rise* – <https://in.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2018/03/13/when-chicago-cut-down-on-suspensions-students-saw-test-scores-and-attendance-rise-study-finds/>

- Reporting on a study using discipline data from 2007-2014, published in the Peabody Journal of Education, Vo. 93, 2018 – Issue 2.
- Study concluded that reduction in out-of-school suspensions for severe infractions was associated with small but statistically significant increases in student test scores, consequential attendance improvements and heterogeneity in changes in students’ perception of school safety.

April 2017 – Christian Science Monitor, *Chicago Schools Big Experiment With A Different Disciplinary Tool: Empathy* – <https://www.csmonitor.com/EqualEd/2017/0412/Chicago-schools-big-experiment-with-a-different-disciplinary-tool-empathy>

- Story of the improved climate of one school and its turnaround.

July 2016 – University of Arkansas, College of Education and Health Professions, Kaitlin Anderson, Dr. Gary Ritter, *Disparate Use of Exclusionary Discipline: Evidence on Inequities in School Discipline from a U.S. State* – https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2838464

- Using seven years of Arkansas discipline data finding that “marginalized” students are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline, but that most differences occur across schools rather than within schools.
- Where schools were split into four categories (Rich White, Rich Minority, Poor White, Poor Minority) they saw that Rich Minority and Poor Minority schools administered longer punishment than Rich White Schools and that Poor White schools were similar to Rich White Schools.

Winter 2017, City-Journal.org, Katherine Kersten, *No Thug Left Behind* – <https://www.city-journal.org/html/no-thug-left-behind-14951.html>

- Anecdotes of Anarchy in St. Paul’s schools after discipline reforms instituted.

- Cites to findings of a 2014 study by J.P. Wright, “*Prior Problem Behavior Accounts for Racial Gap in School Suspensions.*”

2014, Journal of Criminal Justice, J.P. Wright, *Prior Problems Behavior Accounts for Racial Gap in School Suspensions* –

https://c8.nrostatic.com/sites/default/files/pdf_article_040214_KC_HeatherMac.pdf

- Using 1998-1999 Early Childhood Longitudinal Data Set of 21,000 Kindergarteners and Follow-up data in 2000, 2002, 20004, 2007 (K-8).
- “Examined whether measures of prior problem behavior could account for the differences in suspension between both whites and blacks. The results of these analyses were straightforward: The inclusion of a measure of prior problem behavior reduced to statistical insignificance the odds differentials in suspensions between black and white youth. Thus, our results indicate that odds differentials in suspensions are likely produced by pre-existing behavioral problems of youth that are imported into the classroom, that cause classroom disruptions, and that trigger disciplinary measures by teachers and schools officials. Differences in rates of suspensions between racial groups thus appear to be a function of differences in problem behaviors that emerge early in life, that remain relatively stable over time, and that materialize in the classroom.”
- “We remain agnostic on the appropriateness of suspending students from school as a means of discipline. The use of suspensions may, or may not, be an advisable, useful, and meaningful disciplinary mechanism. Indeed, other forms of discipline may be more effective in controlling the behavior of difficult children. The present study does not speak to these effects. However, research has indicated that students who are suspended at the secondary school level are over five times more likely to be charged with a violent crime as an adult (Katsiyannis, Thompson, Barrett, and Kingree, 2012). Ways to mitigate this outcome remain unclear because disciplinary and administrative policies are likely to vary from school to school (Kinsler, 2011). Despite this, we note in our analysis that schools rated as more troublesome by parents remain a significant predictor of suspensions for both races, as well as poor academic achievement for whites. As a result, schools utilizing proactive measures to identify and intervene early with at-risk youth, especially males, or those that attempt to foster positive community relations by involving parents, may show some success.

2009, NBER Working Paper Series, Scott Imberman, et al., *Katrina's Children: Evidence on the Structure of Peer Effects from Hurricane Evacuees* –

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.188.8951&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

- Studies the effects of Hurricane Katrina evacuees on students in school in Houston and Louisiana in which they enrolled.

November 2016, The American Prospect Magazine, Rachel M. Cohen, *Rethinking School Discipline* – <http://prospect.org/article/rethinking-school-discipline>

- Excellent Overview of Discipline Reform movement, the research findings and flaws in the research and responses of school leaders and teachers.
- Leads off with a successful discipline reform in Hampstead Hill, a Baltimore City Charter School.

March 2018 – Heritage Foundation, *Focusing on School Safety After Parkland* – <https://www.heritage.org/firearms/report/focusing-school-safety-after-parkland>

- Looking for warning signs in students who may turn violent.
- Attempts to link failure to discipline with school shootings (pp.50-54).

February 2016, WestEd, *Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review* –

https://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ_Literature-Review_20160217.pdf

- Restorative justice generally portrayed as a promising approach.
- Many limitations in the research done on the effect of restorative justice programs. Internal validity of studies is low. Sample sizes small. Staff capacity and motivation to implement the model varies.

2015? Claudia G. Vanrent, et al., *Effectiveness of School-wide PBIS and Supports in Reducing Racially Inequitable Disciplinary Exclusion in Middle Schools* –

https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/state-reports/copy6_of_dignity-disparity-and-desistance-effective-restorative-justice-strategies-to-plug-the-201cschool-to-prison-pipeline/vincent-SWPBIS-effectiveness-crr-fonf-2013.pdf

- Using a control and trial group, over four years examined effects of PBIS in 35 middle schools in Oregon, both urban and rural. Schools' enrollment was 70% White, 20% Latino, 5% American Indian, 2% Black.

- Found that race remained a predictor of trends in disciplinary exclusion despite implementation of PBIS.
- Found some evidence of greater disciplinary equity in several schools that focused on cultural sensitivity, culturally relevant instruction, and strong school relationships with parents and families.

May 2015, Behavioral Analysis Practice, Alyssa Wilson, *A Critique of Sociocultural Values in PBIS* – <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5048255/>

- This paper advocates to move the three tiers of PBIS toward a mental health approach that recognizes the existence of human suffering, even in children; teaches healthy way to cope with suffering; and measures positive behaviors in addition to tracking maladaptive behaviors requiring discipline.