

# Indicators of School Quality: School Discipline

## **What are school discipline measures?**

School discipline indicators measure the percentage of students subjected to different types of disciplinary actions, such as suspensions or expulsions. States and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) are required by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights to report annually on measures of school quality, climate and safety, including rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement, chronic absenteeism and incidences of violence, including bullying and harassment. These indicators are part of the discipline data reported in the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).

## **Why are school discipline measures important?**

Research shows that exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from instruction—such as suspension and expulsion—place students at greater risk for numerous academic and personal consequences, including behavior problems, lower achievement, disengagement from school and increased risk of dropping out. Additionally, exclusionary and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies show no evidence of improvements in student behavior or increases in school safety.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, exclusionary school discipline practices have a clear connection to what is commonly referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” That pipeline goes from unmet academic and social-emotional needs, leading to challenging behaviors, disciplinary action, disengagement from school, failure to graduate and involvement with the juvenile justice system. A recent study from Texas noted that students who are suspended or expelled are nearly three times as likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the next year.<sup>2</sup>

Research also shows that positive approaches to school discipline at all ages can actually improve students’ academic performance, and those students are less likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system or have need for behavioral services.

## **How has this school quality measure been used to date?**

As is described above, the CRDC includes a number of measures on school discipline. In addition, some states have integrated discipline related measures into their state accountability systems in order to encourage schools to use in-school suspensions when possible rather than out-of-school

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Skiba et al. (2006). “Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations,” American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force.

<sup>2</sup> The Council of State Governments Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute, “Breaking Schools’ Rules: A Statewide Study of How Discipline Relates to Students’ Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement,” July 2011.

suspensions. For example, Vermont’s state accountability system reflects the percent of students excluded from school for out-of-school suspension at least twice during the school year.

In addition, many school districts across the country collect and make public school discipline data. For example, Buffalo Public Schools shares data on the length of suspension and incident reason by school and student characteristics (race/ethnicity, disability status, sex) on the home page of their website. This allows teachers, parents, students and community members to compare schools and groups of students to ensure fairness and identify areas of concern. In addition, Oakland Unified School District provides “data snapshots,” which include suspension data, under the state’s Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) for different groups of students.

Under ESSA, states and school districts are now required to include a number of measures of school discipline on their report cards, including rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement and chronic absenteeism.

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