

Solutions Not Suspensions

Ending the Discipline Gap in Minnesota Public Schools

SEPTEMBER 2013

A Recommendation from the Equity and Excellence Commission to the Secretary of the US Department of Education

“States should be encouraged to reform their rules pertaining to school discipline, where appropriate, to ensure local districts and charter schools provide preventive services in the first instance; if formal discipline is necessary, afford students and their families ample due process; and require high-quality alternative education for any student expelled or removed from a traditional school setting.”

—*For Each and Every Child—A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*
U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2013

This Brief Will Cover

I. Behavior and Learning in U.S.

Classrooms: Research on the overuse and negative outcomes of suspensions in schools.

II. Racial Disparities in Suspension

Rates Nationwide: Overview of what gaps exist between African American male students and all other students in regards to school suspensions in the U.S.

III. The Discipline Gap in Minnesota

Schools: An analysis of Minnesota's Discipline gap and analysis of local school district case study.

IV. It's Time for Change: Examples of

Discipline Reform in the U.S. : Brief descriptions of what school districts have done to reform school discipline policies and the positive results.

V. Local Conclusions and

Recommendations from MMEP to Address the Racial Discipline Gap in MN: Discipline policy reform recommendations crafted by the MMEP Solutions Not Suspensions' Collaborative Policy Teams.

We are living in an era where more and more of our national population consists of a multitude of diverse racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, and our classrooms are reflective of this shift. With this demographic shift comes the demand for new strategies and skills in education that will address the needs of students of color to ensure their educational success. It is no secret that our country is facing a devastating educational achievement gap between students of color and white students that is setting us up for an economic crisis consisting of an excess of jobs requiring certain skills and experience that will go unfulfilled due to lack of qualified individuals to fill them.

We can no longer afford to ignore these achievement gaps between students and the factors that create and maintain them. Identifying crucial benchmarks and indicators of educational downfall has been key to addressing the achievement gap and beginning the work to eliminate it. While detecting benchmarks in test scores is important, identifying the amount of time lost, reasons for, and alternatives to disciplinary actions that take students out of the classroom and away from learning is equally important to understanding the whole picture of circumstances that lead to underperforming and limited achievement. Russell Skiba, a professor in counseling and educational psychology at Indiana State University and leading academic on equity in education said, “If we can shift to an understanding that schools are not going to get to the outcomes that they're desiring as far as academics until they get a handle on issues of school climate and discipline, then I think we might see more resources flowing in that direction.”¹ With an intentional effort to close the discipline gap in schools as a major factor in eliminating racial disparities, we could see not only see improved graduation rates and test scores, but more importantly, greater inclusion and equity for all of our students.

Behavior and Learning in U.S. Classrooms: Unintended Consequences

Since the 1970's, in an effort to reduce incidences of violence, schools and state legislatures created zero-tolerance policies that mandated the removal of students for serious violent offenses and weapons. In the wake of recent tragedies there has been additional public pressure for schools to increase safety efforts and protect students from harm.

The use of these zero-tolerance policies have since been widened to encompass many more types of offenses, many of which involve non-violent, minor misbehavior.² The unintended consequences of these types of policies are the large disproportionate discipline gaps that exist and persist between White students and African American students. Furthermore the reasons for utilizing zero tolerance policies and exclusionary practices (expulsions, suspensions, and admin-

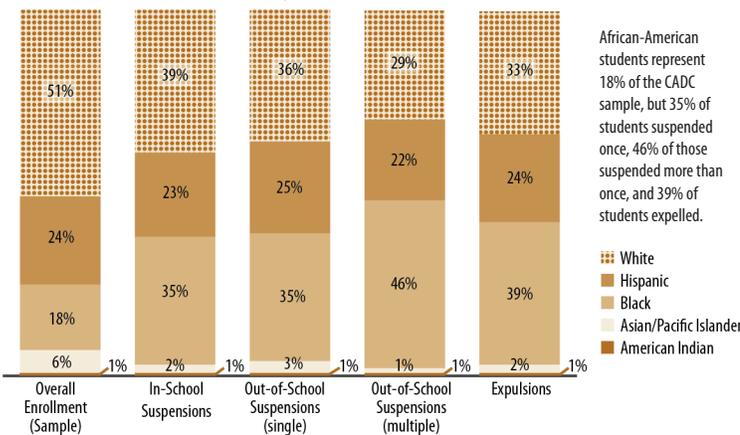
istrative transfers) are not met with evidence supporting that they are achieving desired positive results.³ Commonly cited reasons include deterring students from future misbehavior and to improve learning environments. Research offers little support for the idea that suspensions deter future behavior. In several longitudinal studies, students that have received suspensions in 6th grade are at an increased risk of being suspended in middle and high school.³ Moreover, in an experiment out of Oakland, CA, teachers were allowed to remove “disruptive” students from the classroom. What emerged was the identification of other students, who had not normally been deemed “disruptive” as having behavior problems. This leaves open the possibility that it may, in fact, be the classroom environment created by teachers that is evoking misbehavior and poor performance. Several other studies show that schools with the highest suspensions rates also report the poorest in school climate.³

Serious Consequences for Non-Violent Behavior

Contrary to popular belief, federal data collected from 2009-2010 shows that the majority of suspensions are NOT issued for violent or serious offenses.⁴ While serious offenses should be met with serious consequences, most out-of-school suspensions are issued for minor, non-violent student behavior. For non-violent misbehavior, there are many other responses that can be utilized to effectively address issues of disruption and avoid the detrimental outcomes for students that result from out-of-school suspensions. Although suspensions may temporarily remove student misbehavior from the classroom, there is no data that concludes that out-of-school suspensions or expulsions reduce rates of disruption or improve school climate or student behavior.⁵ Furthermore, research shows that student suspension is a strong predictor of a student’s failure to graduate on time and likelihood of dropping out. Research mentioned in the report “Out of School and Off Track,”³⁴ shows that students that are suspended just once in ninth grade increase their dropout risk from 16% to 32%. Moreover, a study by Balfanz and Boccanfuso⁶ found that students who had been suspended in middle school were half as likely to graduate on time as students who had not been suspended. Both of these outcomes can be tied to the fact that students sent out of school are missing valuable learning time and therefore, fall behind in their educational achievement.⁷

(Figure 1, Transformed Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012)

National Discipline Rates by Race



On top of all other negative effects, what may be the most detrimental outcome associated with student suspension is the increased likelihood to be pushed into the juvenile justice system.^{2, 8} The correlation between student suspension and involvement with the juvenile justice system is an outcome that far surpasses temporary hindrances to leading a productive life. More and more, simple student misbehavior is leading to criminal or juvenile delinquency charges. This is due, in part, to schools allowing school resource officers (police) into their schools with full disciplinary authority. What is more alarming is that there are several instances in which law enforcement is involved for nonviolent offenses.⁸ With an officer present in the schools, enforcing broad and vague criminal laws, student misconduct can easily be translated into an arrest.

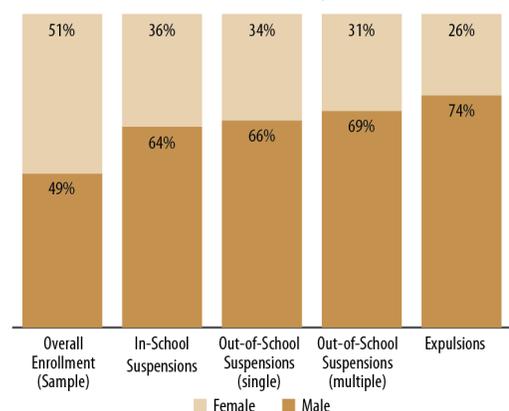
With these kinds of devastating outcomes for students subjected to out-of-school suspensions, and the fact that suspensions do not improve overall misbehavior or school climate, is this kind of discipline promoting the goals of our education system? Moreover, is it even effective? Is a punitive, criminal response to arguably normal adolescent behavior an effective way to educate our youth and prepare the workforce of tomorrow? Data and research say no.

Racial Disparities in Suspension Rates Nationwide

Across the country, students of color, specifically African American students, are being suspended at much higher rates than other students. In a study of all school districts, nationwide, the Civil Rights Data Collection⁸ reports that African American students are over 3 ½ times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers. Nationally, African American students make up 18% of total enrolled students in the country, but represent 46% of students receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions. Their White peers make up over half (51%) of the total students enrolled in schools nationally, but only 29% of receiving multiple suspensions (see Figure 1). In addition, the gender gap shows that while, nationally, the enrollment of male and female students is almost equal, male students represent 66% of all out-of-school suspensions and 69% of students receiving multiple suspensions (see Figure 2). Combining both race and gender, the report found that one in every five (20%) African American males receive an out-of-school suspension compared to only about one in every fourteen (7%) of all white male students.⁹

(Figure 2, Transformed Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012)

National Discipline Rates by Gender



(Figure 2)

Rates for discipline, including suspension and expulsion, introduce a race based discipline gap that directly contributes to the race based academic achievement gap. Several studies point out that students of color receive harsher punishment for the same conduct as their white peers. For minor misconduct and reasons that require the subjective evaluation of a teacher, like disrespect and excessive noise; African American students are more likely to be suspended than their white classmates.¹⁰

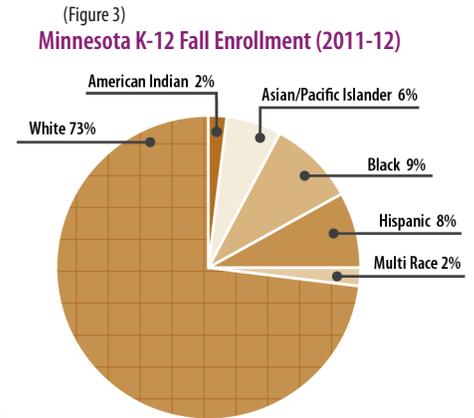
An article published in the Urban Education Journal, entitled, “Why are Students of Color (Still) Punished More Severely and Frequently Than White Students,” highlighted several potential reasons explaining why exclusionary discipline practices are issued to Black and Brown students more than to white students:

1. Teacher and administrative fear.
2. Institutional and individual racism.
3. Under-preparation in teacher education.
4. Instructional practices and cultural conflict.
5. Ineffective leadership.
6. Inadequate counseling and psychological services.

None of these reasons include Black and Brown students misbehaving more frequently than their White peers. Almost all available research on this topic of student suspensions and misbehavior shows no evidence that African American students misbehave more often or more severely than White students. An associate professor in special education, Brenda Townsend, argues that in respects to African American males, “when the majority of school suspensions and expulsions are meted out to a minority of the school population, those students are likely to interpret the disparity as rejection, and, as a result, develop a collective, self-fulfilling belief that they are incapable of abiding by the school’s social and behavioral codes.”¹¹ With this understanding, it is not surprising that students that receive a suspension are at a much higher risk for developing antisocial behaviors.¹² This point lends support to the notion that in order to address discipline disparities and skyrocketing rates, educational institutions need to shift from the mindset of simply “fixing” student behavior, to looking at the ways in which our education systems can reform policies and practices to encourage understanding and relationship building that will foster positive behavior and student engagement.

The Discipline Gap in Minnesota Schools

While the suspension rates for the nation as a whole are troubling, the discipline gap that exists in Minnesota schools is alarming. In a report released by the Office for Civil Rights Remedies, an examination of the Black/White suspension risk gap for each state was conducted (Table 1).² With a student sample size of 90% of all Minnesota students, MN ranked 6th in the nation for the largest Black/White suspension risk gap during the 2009-2010 school year.² When looking at the enrollment statistics in Minnesota schools (Figure 3), we see that African American students make up only 9% of our enrolled student population and an overwhelming majority of our enrolled student population is White.



(Table 1, Opportunities Suspended, 2012)

All Students Combined Suspension Risk Percentage Ranked by Black-White % Gap									
Rank	State	Black-White % Gap	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian American	Latino	Black	White	Total	% of Students in Sample
1	IL	21.3	6.9	1.1	7.8	25.3	3.9	9.8	78
2	MO	18.4	5.6	2.0	5.2	22.8	4.4	8.0	77
3	CT	18.1	3.3	1.1	13.5	20.4	2.4	7.1	82
4	TN	16.4	4.1	2.1	6.0	21.1	4.7	8.9	95
5	MI	15.9	7.6	12.5	8.0	22.1	6.2	9.6	70
6	MN	15.4	11.9	1.9	5.8	18.3	2.8	4.9	90*
7	WI*	15.3	7.3	1.3	5.8	18.5	3.2	4.5	71*
8	DE	14.4	9.3	1.6	10.2	21.8	7.3	12.3	93
9	NV	14.4	10.8	5.5	12.3	22.6	8.2	11.2	100
10	OH	14.0	2.4	1.1	7.6	18.6	4.6	7.7	71
11	NE	14.0	12.3	2.0	5.3	17.6	3.6	5.4	79
12	IN	13.6	3.9	1.5	8.4	19.5	5.9	8.3	78
13	AR	13.2	3.2	3.6	6.3	18.5	5.3	8.5	70
14	SC	13.2	7.8	2.5	7.8	21.0	7.9	12.7	96
15	PA	13.2	2.0	1.3	10.2	16.7	3.6	6.5	77
16	KS	12.8	5.2	2.0	7.1	16.8	4.0	6.0	75
17	OK	12.5	5.8	2.7	7.0	18.3	5.8	7.7	71
18	TX	12.3	3.8	1.4	6.5	15.4	3.2	6.5	88
19	GA	4.5	4.5	2.5	6.0	17.1	4.9	9.6	98
20	CA	10.6	10.6	2.6	7.5	17.7	5.6	7.1	91
21	VA	6.8	6.8	1.8	5.7	16.6	5.0	7.9	94

Continued on page 4

But, when we look at the students receiving the highest percentage of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and exclusion (Figure 4), we see that African American students represent 40% of the out-of-school disciplinary action issued to students, which is just about the same percentage of the out-of-school disciplinary action issued to white students who make up almost 75% of the entire student enrollment population.¹³ This demonstrates, that even though there is data to show the rate at which students are suspended, there is no specific public data available to tell us the specific number of Minnesota students, by race and gender (combined), that have been suspended, nor the length of time each of those suspensions last. For example, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) public data does not tell us how many African American boys have been suspended for insubordination in the state of Minnesota and the amount of time they were removed from school for those offenses. Nonetheless, MDE’s Disciplinary Incident Reporting System (DIRS) uses language that infers criminal activity on the part of students, like “offenders” to refer to students and references actions removing students from either the educational setting or the school all together as options for “actions taken against the offender.”¹⁴

There needs to be a transformation of this criminalizing language towards a neutral description of student behaviors. There is also a need to redress the lack of tracking intervention or preventative measures used prior to exclusionary responses. Specific data is necessary for administrators and teachers to properly analyze and understand who is getting suspended, the reasons for the suspensions, and to inform how better efforts can be made to eliminate the disparities that exist in the discipline rates. Also, that data should be made public to parents and the community so they remain informed and can be helpful in figuring out solutions.

(Table 1 Continued)

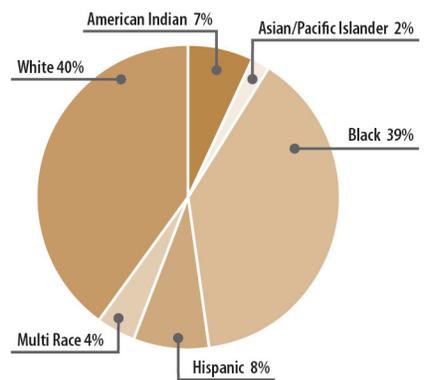
All Students Combined Suspension Risk Percentage Ranked by Black-White % Gap									
Rank	State	Black-White % Gap	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian American	Latino	Black	White	Total	% of Students in Sample
22	MS	4.4	4.4	2.4	4.7	17.6	6.4	11.9	91
23	IA	4.4	4.4	1.4	5.0	13.9	3.0	4.1	68
24	AL	3.5	3.5	1.6	4.9	16.3	5.6	9.3	96
25	NC	17.8	17.8	1.8	6.8	16.3	6.1	9.2	94
26	WV	0.0	0.0	1.0	7.6	18.9	8.7	9.3	91
27	CO	12.1	12.1	2.8	8.3	13.9	4.3	6.1	94
28	KY	1.0	1.0	1.5	4.1	13.9	4.6	5.8	84
29	NJ	1.5	1.5	1.0	6.6	12.0	3.3	5.5	75
30	RI	9.2	9.2	4.9	11.2	15.6	7.0	8.6	84
31	LA	6.7	6.7	2.3	5.9	15.3	7.0	10.7	96
32	AZ	8.9	8.9	2.3	7.1	12.5	4.6	6.3	84
33	WA	12.0	12.0	3.2	8.7	13.6	5.8	6.8	89
34	OR	8.2	8.2	1.9	6.7	12.5	4.9	5.5	83
35	MA	4.7	4.7	2.0	12.3	11.5	4.3	6.3	79
36	AK	8.7	8.7	3.9	5.2	10.9	4.5	5.9	90
37	MD*	5.7	5.7	1.4	4.3	11.0	4.9	6.9	100*
38	NH	3.3	3.3	0.9	9.2	11.4	6.1	6.3	77
39	SD	7.2	7.2	1.3	5.6	7.1	2.2	3.1	77
40	UT	6.7	6.7	2.3	5.0	6.2	2.1	2.7	85
41	ME	3.3	3.3	0.9	2.2	8.7	4.6	4.7	78
42	WY	13.2	13.2	5.8	8.0	13.8	10.0	9.8	81
43	VT	7.3	7.3	0.4	0.9	6.5	4.4	4.5	59
44	ND	7.6	7.6	0.0	2.2	3.6	1.6	2.2	81
45	NM	6.6	6.6	1.8	6.4	6.1	4.4	5.8	90
46	ID	6.0	6.0	1.6	4.7	4.2	3.2	3.5	85
47	MT	11.3	11.3	0.0	3.9	3.4	3.8	4.8	80

*MD and WI each had a large district removed from the sample so the size depicted on the right is no longer accurate and their estimates should be reviewed with extra caution.

(Figure 4)

Out-of-School Suspensions/Expulsions/Exclusion in Minnesota (2011-12)

For African American students in Minnesota, the risk of being suspended is far greater than that for white students.



Local Case Study: The Discipline Gap in Minneapolis Public Schools

Minneapolis Public School District:

The Minneapolis Public Schools District is located in the urban city of Minneapolis, MN comprised of 40 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, 9 high schools, 5 charter or self-governed schools and 15 alternative schools or alternative programs. It is the 3rd largest school district in Minnesota. The district is divided into 3 different areas based on locality. Since 2000, MPS enrollment has dropped from 48,689 students to 34,423 students in 2012. Of the students enrolled in 2012, 36.18% of students were African American, 32.79% White, 18.77% Hispanic, 7.59% Asian, 4.56% Native American, and 0.13% Pacific Islander.¹⁵

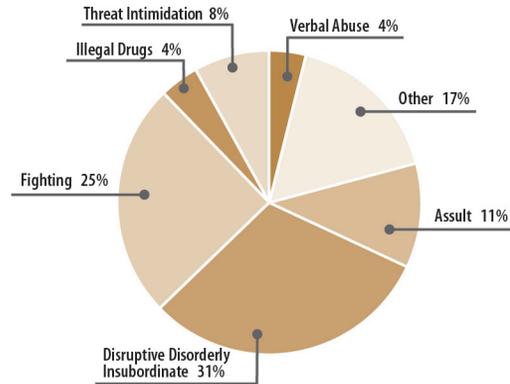
Collectively, Minneapolis Public School District has a relatively low suspension rate of its overall student population, with only 9.3% of its students receiving a suspension for more than one day. The issue arises when we dig deeper into these suspensions and determine which students are being suspended. When looking at a racial and gender breakdowns of student suspensions; we can see a huge disparity in the rate of suspensions. In 2012, the suspension rates for white males, who make up about 18% of the enrolled student population was at 3.4%. But for African American males who make up about 19% of the enrolled student population, similar to their white male counterparts, the suspension rate was 18.7%.¹⁶

Available data (Table 2) gives us the range of suspensions time that each incident type can invoke, mostly 0-5 days. This makes it almost impossible to solidify the total amount of time students are spending outside of school due to suspensions. Research shows that males receive more suspensions than female students and, from national and local data, it is clear that African American males receive more suspensions than any other students, with almost one in every five African American male students being suspended for more than one day. Also, when evaluating this data, we have to take into account the very real possibility that of the reported number of African American boys being suspended, several of them may be suspended multiple times. Nationally and locally, schools are instructed to count each suspended student only once, even if they've been suspended more than once.¹⁷

We Don't HAVE to Suspend Students Mandatory VS Elected Suspensions

According to the current Minneapolis Public Schools' Code of Conduct (Table 2), there are guidelines that determine which offenses warrant mandatory suspensions, and those that are left up to the determination of the teacher/administrator. While the suspension period for mandatory suspensions is clear for students in grades 6-12, nearly all other offense types allow for administrators to determine how long a student will be kept from the classroom. Perhaps the most startling piece of "The Consequences for Misbehavior" (Table 2), is the offense category of "Other" which made up nearly one fifth of all suspensions issued in the 2011-12 school year (Figure 5), and which allows administrators to push a student out of school for up to FIVE DAYS without having to select an offense category for which they are suspending.

(Figure 5)
Reasons for Suspensions in Minneapolis Public Schools, 2011-12



Research shows that males receive more suspensions than female students and, from national and local data, it is clear that African American males receive more suspensions than any other students, with almost one in every five African American male students being suspended for more than one day.

When evaluating the reasons students are being suspended, data released from the MPS Data Quality Administrator (2011 Reasons for Suspensions by Ethnicity by Gender) shows that of the total number of suspensions issued to African American boys, less than half (1,277) were mandatory. This means that for the offenses resulting in the remaining half of suspensions issued to African American males, alternative measures could have been utilized to handle the behavioral issue and gets these students back in class.

Minneapolis Public Schools Consequences for Misbehavior (Table 2, MPS Code of Conduct)

MANDATORY SUSPENSIONS									
Category	Description	Intervention plus suspension		Police Referral		Rec. for Transfer		Rec. for Expulsion	
		K-5	6-12	K-5	6-12	K-5	6-12	K-5	6-12
Weapons		1-5 days	5 days	May	Yes	May	Yes	May	Yes
Assault	Physical; sexual	1-5 days	5 days	May	Yes	May	Yes	May	Yes
Fighting		1-3 days	3 days	No	May				
Alcohol and other drugs: possession and / use	First offence	1 day	3 days	May	May				
	Repeat offence	1 Day	5 days						
Bomb/terroristic threats		1-5 day	5 days	May	May	May	May	May	May
Sale of alcohol or other drug		5 days	5 days	Yes	Yes	May	Yes	May	Yes

GUIDELINES FOR OTHER OFFENCES									
Category	Description	Intervention plus suspension		Police Referral		Rec. for Transfer		Rec. for Expulsion	
		K-5	6-12	K-5	6-12	K-5	6-12	K-5	6-12
Threats	Threats: Extortion	Intervention plus 0-5 days		May	May	May	May	May	May
Physical Aggression	Pushing, poking, shoving scuffling, unfriendly touch, biting, spitting, hazing	Intervention plus 0-2 days							
Bullying	Intentional infliction, or attempt to inflict injury or discomfort	Intervention plus 0-2 days					May		
Defiance	Defiance; failure to comply with request or direction from an adult; persistent lack of cooperation	Intervention plus 0-3 days							
Verbal abuse/ disrespect	Disrespect to adult or student; gestures of disobedience	Intervention plus 0-3 days							
Harassment	Sexual, racial, cultural, religious, disability	Intervention plus 0-3 days		May	May	May	May	May	May
Tobacco	First offence	Intervention plus 0-1 day		May	May				
	Repeat offence	Intervention plus 0-5 days		May	May				
Property offences	Vandalism; theft; possession of stolen property; unauthorized use of school equipment	Intervention plus 0-5 days		May	May			May	May
Trespassing		Intervention plus 0-5 days		May	May				
Fire arms		Intervention plus 0-2 days		May	May				
Other safety violations	Willful neglect of safety of self others; fireworks, stink-bombs	Intervention plus 0-5 days		May	May	May	May	May	May
Bus discipline	When suspension is given, misbehavior coded by categories above. Day transportation privileges denied determined by principal.								
Other	As deemed necessary by school administrator	Intervention plus 0-5 days							

It is Time for Change

Examples of Discipline Policy Reform

As our national population becomes more diversified, we need to address systems that are failing to increase our nation's ability to remain competitive in a global economy. One of the fastest growing populations in U.S. schools, African Americans, needs to make the most academic progress in order to close the achievement gap. Knowing this, we cannot afford to allow the push out and disproportionate suspension rates of African American students, specifically males, to continue. Research shows that these administrative measures are the first step toward falling behind academically and leaving school altogether. We cannot teach students that are not in class. As a community and a state, we need to advocate for policies that dismantle the push out of African American males from education and demand that alternative practices to suspension be made mandatory in all schools, to truly address issues that lead to student misbehavior and get students back into the classroom.

Examples of school, districts and states taking the steps to address suspension rates and improved educational outcomes for African American students are appearing all over the nation. With so many cities leading the way in discipline reform, there are several models available to assist Minnesota public schools in updating their Codes of Conduct and discipline policies and procedures, as well as initiating alternative solutions and programming to improve school culture and student success. Collaborative efforts between school districts and outside organizations have been at the forefront of creating positive educational reform and positive results for increasing the success of African American males in education. Furthermore, national organizations like the Advancement Project, whose mission is: "To develop, encourage, and widely disseminate innovative ideas, and pioneer models that inspire and mobilize a broad national racial justice movement to achieve universal opportunity and a just democracy!" have devoted staff time and expertise to assisting grassroots organizing against racial injustice, with a specific focus on ending the "schoolhouse to jailhouse track", that begins with school discipline reform.¹⁸

Baltimore, MD

A collaborative effort of school systems, local philanthropies, non-profits, and government officials came together, with help from the Baltimore Open Society Institute, to propose a new discipline system for Baltimore schools. The State Board of Education approved proposed regulations intended to cut back suspensions and keep students in the classroom. These regulations include:

- Banning zero-tolerance policies with automatic consequences.
- Only using suspensions and expulsion as a last resort.
- Additionally, this proposal takes things a step further requiring that the state's 24 school systems track data weekly to ensure minority and special education students are not unduly affected by suspensions, and other disciplinary measures.

Results

In the 2003-04 school year:

- Less than one out of two black male students graduated.
- Baltimore schools handed out nearly 26,000 suspensions to a student body of just over 88,000 kids. Two-thirds were to boys and, reflecting the city's population, nearly all were to black students.

Fast forward to the 2009-10 school year, after reforms to discipline practices were made:

- Two out of three black male students graduated.
- The District handed out fewer than 10,000 suspensions.
- Importantly, far fewer were longer than five days
- Any disparities identified would have to be reduced within a year and eliminated by three years.

Denver, CO

The community based organization, Padres y Jovenes Unidos, began a campaign against the school to jail track they saw perpetuated in Denver Public Schools (Books Not Bars, 2011). From 2005 to 2008, Padres y Jovenes Unidos partnered with the Advancement Project to work with Denver Public Schools (DPS) and community members in crafting a reformed discipline policy that promotes high academic achievement, school safety and healthier learning environments. At the forefront of this working group was to eliminate the disciplinary measures that needlessly exclude students from school and the over use of the police and juvenile justice system to handle minor disciplinary matters.

Current Results:

- After the successful passing of the 2008 discipline policy, a report card was created to hold DPS accountable to implementing the new policy.
- The report card is based on data that is collected and publically reported to allow the community to grade the district on the progress they feel is being made.
- The data represented on this report card is based on specific categories for improvement (out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, racial disparities, restorative justice, training, and data collection).
- ALL Colorado School Districts are now required to establish alternative practices, such as Restorative Justice, in their discipline policies.
- The Denver police department and Denver Public Schools have passed an "Intergovernmental Agreement" that specifies the "School Resource Officers" role and understanding of the new discipline policies and assistance in focusing on restorative practices and minimizing the use of law enforcement intervention

MMEP Solutions Not Suspensions' Discipline Policy Reform Recommendations

Through a community collaborative process, MMEP along with: community leaders, youth advocates, parents and students came together as a team to discuss issues of school discipline and develop research-based, data driven discipline policy reform recommendations that reflect the wants, needs and concerns of families and students. The following are recommendations for discipline policy reform for Minnesota school districts:

- 1. School discipline policies should align with a restorative framework, encourage models of positive behavior, and focus on alternative practices in all schools.** Within discipline policies, there must be clear restrictions and guidelines on the use of disciplinary responses to misbehavior that include necessitated use of intervention practices for minor misconduct prior to any exclusionary response. Minor misconduct should be regarded as any behavior that does not MANDATE exclusionary responses (assault, weapons, and terroristic threats). For all other conduct, appropriate interventions addressing the specific issue should be utilized.
- 2. There needs to be a concerted, intentional process developed to gather and understand the holistic context in which incidents of misbehavior occur prior to any reactive response.** Examples of this may include asking student witnesses their perspective on the incident or reviewing past interactions between student and teacher or student and student.
- 3. The role and responsibility of law enforcement in schools need to be clarified through a memorandum of understanding that limits the use of school-based arrests and ticketing to violent, serious offenses that unmistakably threaten and endanger the safety of staff and students.** Law enforcement should commit to supporting and abiding by a restorative framework that encourages addressing student misconduct with school intervention practices. Students and community voices should be included in the creation of this memorandum of understanding. Because restorative practices have proven to achieve the desired outcomes courts and county attorneys are presumably looking for, the use of restorative practices in schools should also be considered as an alternative to court involvement for incidences where law enforcement is called for.

4. Create a public reporting system for discipline data that is disaggregated by misbehavior type, age, gender, grade, race/ethnicity, school, teacher/staff, date of incident, and response taken. This data should be used by schools and districts: to track program success, identify areas of improvement, identify trends in teacher/staff referrals, and trends in misbehavior to better tailor alternative programming. Parents should also have access to this data pertaining to their individual student(s) in order to fully engage in preventing further misbehavior or escalation. Additionally, this type of data collection, paired with data collection on educational achievement measures would help to evaluate the impact alternative disciplinary interventions are having and which are most influential in improving engagement and achievement.

5. Eliminate the option for out-of-school suspension/expulsion of any kindergarteners. Pushing students out during their introductory year to education and the fragile time period of psychological development is damaging to student engagement. All incidents of misbehavior, especially for our youngest learners, should be understood as learning opportunities and addressed accordingly.

6. Partner with parents, students and community organizations in the development of alternative interventions specifically designed and proven to address different types of misbehavior. ie. Drug counseling for drug possession/use, Not only will these partnerships provide for productive interventions to address root causes of misbehavior, but also the opportunity for stronger collaboration and trust between community partners and schools.

7. Mandatory cultural competence and anti-racism professional development training is necessary for teachers and staff to be well-educated and aware of situations and circumstances students are facing inside and outside of school, as well as an examination and understanding of subconscious biases or underlying assumptions they may hold, prior to responding to student misconduct. We measure students through MCA II testing and other forms of assessments but where are the assessments for the teachers that are measurable and show them where they are in regards to their cultural competence or biases?

MMEP and the MMEP Solutions Not Suspensions campaign are committed to providing support to both school districts and communities in the process of reforming discipline policies and practices to ensure the empowerment, engagement, and equitable treatment of students of color. Through continued research and community collaboration, we are identifying interventions and alternatives that can effectively close the discipline gap in Minnesota schools, and enhance the academic achievement and elevate the inherent dignity of all of our students.

MMEP Staff and Fellows

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TITLE DESCRIPTION

African American	Black, African American, Black non-Hispanic, African
Asian/Pacific Islander	Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian-American
Hispanic	Latino, Mexican, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican and any other descendants of Latin American countries or citizens and immigrants from those countries
White	Anglo/Caucasian, European
American Indian	American Indian, Alaskan Natives, Native Americans

The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership acknowledges and respects the unique identity of people and communities. Research in this country has yet to come to a consensus for how to best collect, analyze and categorize information on students. In our best effort to accurately report and translate all data used in this brief, the above table is an effort to include and encompass all terms that may be referenced.

FOOTNOTES

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