

## School discipline trends in Denver Public Schools: 2008-2012

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### DPS-DU Partnership Overview

The overarching mission of the partnership is to enhance the district's capacity for data-driven decision-making in their efforts to eliminate racial disparities in school discipline practices, reduce student achievement gaps, and improve academic outcomes for all students. A team of DPS administrators and GSSW faculty members are collaborating with local stakeholders to achieve the following goals:

1. Identify the root causes and academic consequences of racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline sanctions.
2. Increase youth, family, school, community involvement in data interpretation and application to decision-making.
3. Define a research, policy, and practice agenda targeting racial disparities in school discipline

## **Executive Summary of the Fall 2013 Research Report**

- While DPS student enrollment has increased over the past four years, the use of out of school suspensions and expulsions has decreased. This trend has benefited students of all backgrounds.
- Despite these reductions, district-wide racial disparities in rates of office disciplinary referrals, suspension and referral to law enforcement persist, and in some cases, have worsened. After accounting for student characteristics like gender, disability and family income, DPS data show that race still matters in school discipline practices. Black and Latino students in particular are more likely than White or Asian students to be suspended from school and referred to law enforcement for the same behavior.
- The effect of race decreases throughout the discipline process: race has the strongest effect on office disciplinary referrals and has no independent influence on expulsion decisions.
- Over the last four years, high school administrators at the aggregate level have eliminated the influence of race on their decisions to suspend a student once they are referred to the office. This is a remarkable achievement; however, disproportionalities in suspension will persist until race no longer predicts who is sent to the office. In contrast, middle schools have seen a decline in the influence of gender and socioeconomic status on administrators' decisions about discipline resolutions, but racial disparities have worsened over time. At the elementary level, no clear trends are evident.
- The therapeutic and restorative approaches outlined by JK-R are promising strategies to manage student behavior problems and keep youth in school. In DPS, students with behavior problems are significantly less likely to experience an out of school suspension if they receive these interventions after being referred to the office.

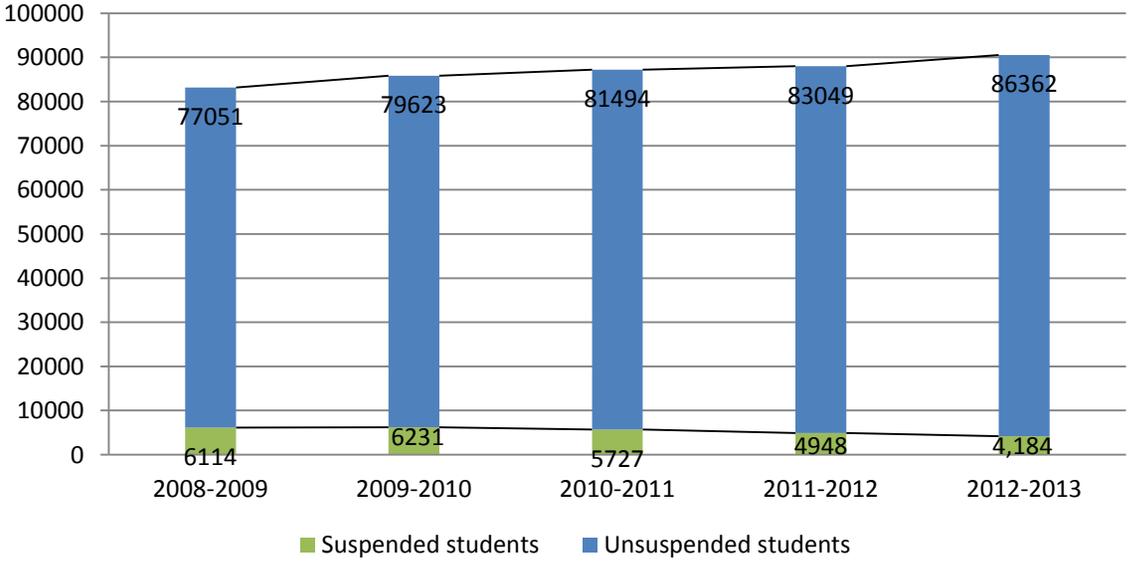
## **Implications & Recommendations**

1. Prevention efforts in the classroom, not only at the administrative level, will be necessary to eliminate disparities and reduce suspensions. Teachers need training in culturally responsive, classroom-based behavioral interventions that prevent office referrals for Black, Latino, and male students in particular.
2. Our analyses provide robust evidence that restorative approaches (RA) and in-school suspensions are effective alternatives to out of school suspension. Additional resources, such as RA coordinators and counselors for ISS rooms are needed to implement these interventions widely.

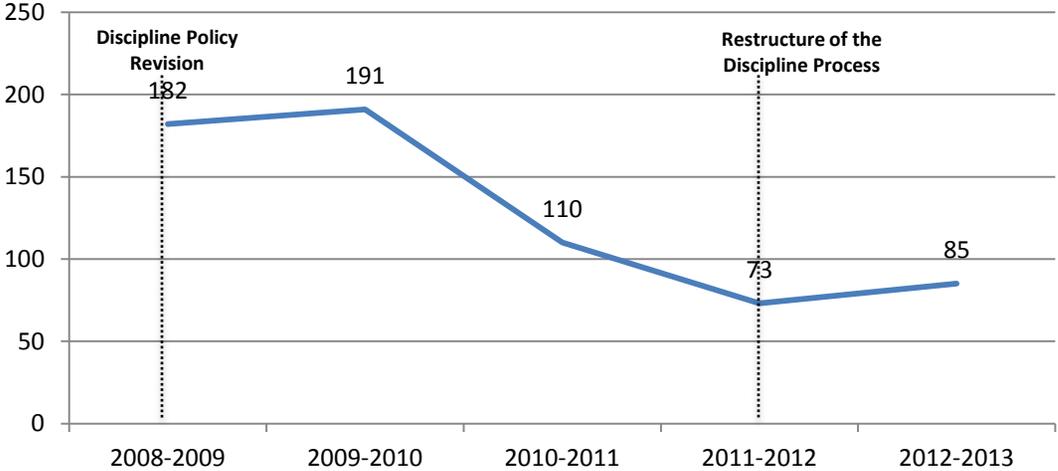
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Across Denver Public Schools, the use of out of school suspensions and expulsions in response to behavior problems is decreasing at a time when the overall district population is increasing.

**Number of Students Suspended from School  
2008-2013**



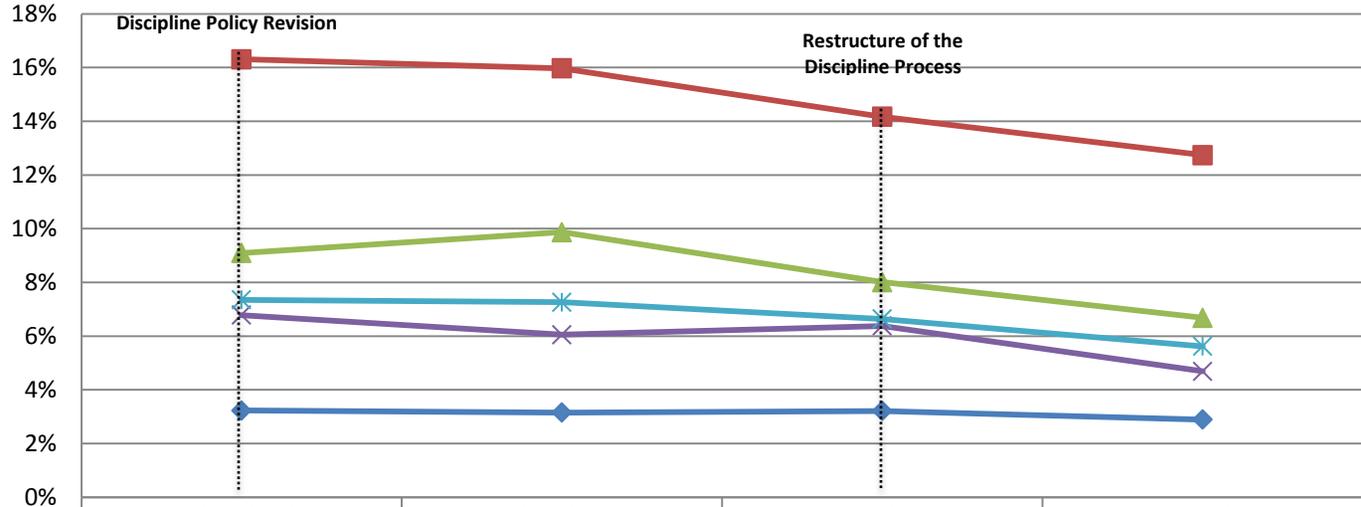
**Number of Students Expelled:  
2008-2013**



These trends speak to the adherence to board policy JK-R and to continued improvement in the practice of managing expulsion requests and the independence of the expulsion officer.

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**% of Students Suspended by Grade Level: 2008-2012**

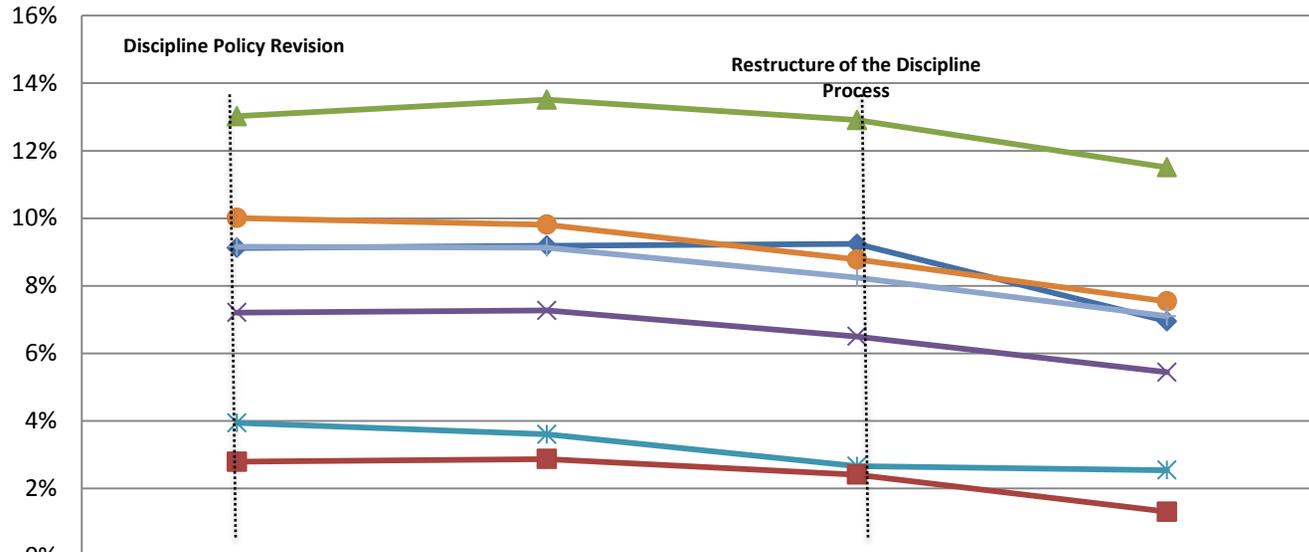


	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
High School	9%	10%	8%	7%
Middle	16%	16%	14%	13%
Elementary	3%	3%	3%	3%
Alternative Configuration	7%	6%	6%	5%
Total	7%	7%	7%	6%

Suspension rates are highest in traditional middle schools, followed by high schools. Since 2009, the use of suspensions has decreased in these secondary schools at a faster rate than the district overall.

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**% of Students Suspended by Race, Class and Gender: 2008-2012**



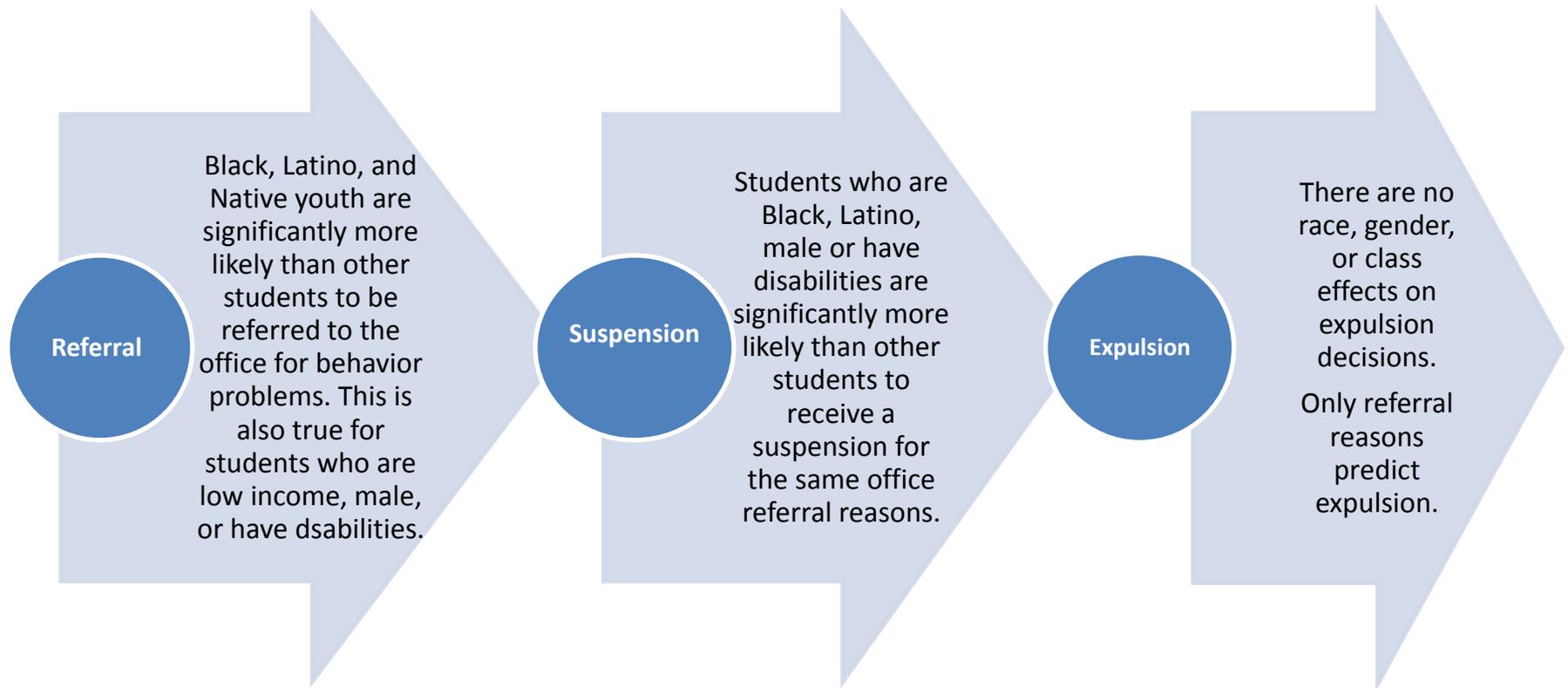
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Black	13%	14%	13%	12%
Latino	7%	7%	7%	5%
Native	9%	9%	9%	7%
White	4%	4%	3%	3%
Asian	3%	3%	2%	1%
Male	10%	10%	9%	8%
FRL Eligible	9%	9%	8%	7%

Since 2008, all groups have seen a decline in the percentage of students suspended. This speaks to the power behind the revised policy JK-R.

- However, Black, Latino and Native students are still suspended at much higher rates than their White or Asian counterparts.
- These gaps between groups have not decreased over time.

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The effect of race, class, disability and gender through the discipline process in all DPS schools  
(2011-2012)\*

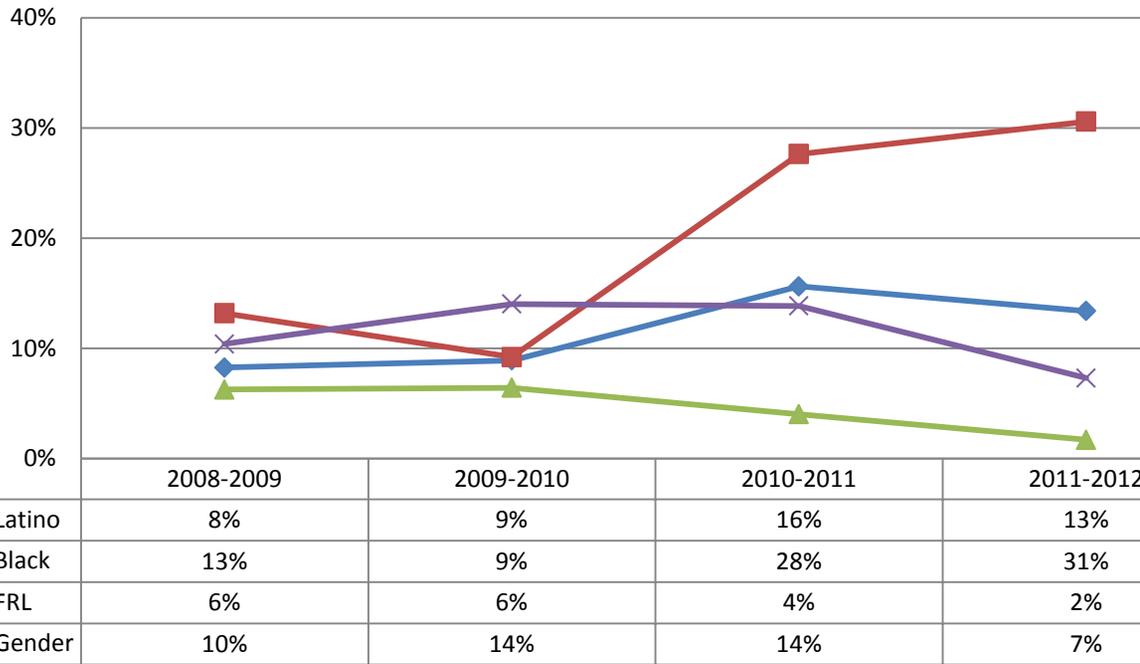


Disproportionality in suspensions and expulsion are driven by disparities in office referrals.

\*These analyses ruled out other factors that contribute to office referrals, suspensions and expulsions, like the reason for their office disciplinary referral and the demographics of the school. See appendix for full results.

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**Race, Class and Gender Disparities in Suspension Decisions  
District Wide\***



Using advanced statistics to rule out other factors that influence out of school suspensions and expulsions, like a student’s special education status, office referral reasons, and the demographics of their school, these charts show the independent contribution of students’ gender, poverty status, and race to their risk of suspension and expulsion after they’ve been referred to the office.

- Black and Latino students are significantly more likely than White students to receive a suspension for the same behavior. In other words, they are punished more harshly for the same referral reasons. These disparities have increased since the 2009 school year.
- Male students are significantly more likely than female students to receive a suspension for the same behavior. These disparities have improved in the most recent year of analysis.
- Low-income students are only slightly (and not statistically significantly) more likely to be suspended than higher income students, which is an improvement from 2008.

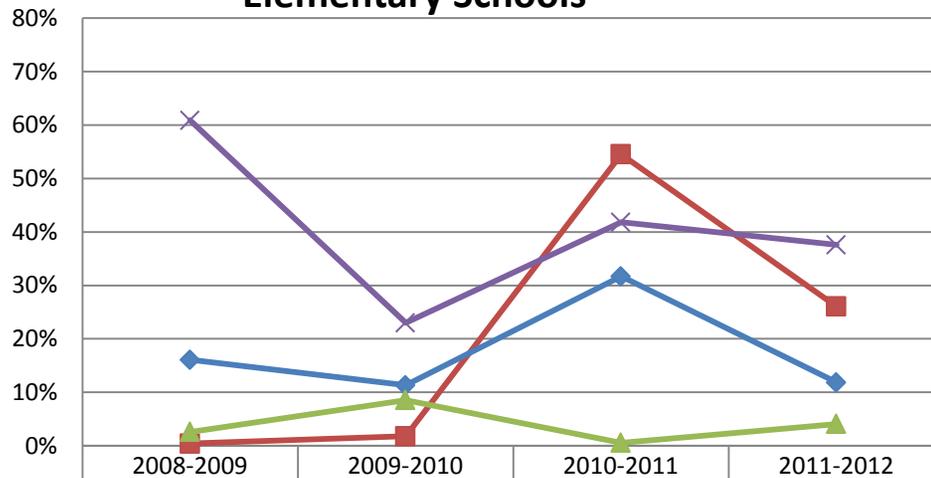
This suggests that higher rates of suspension among Black, Latino, and male students are not solely the result of higher rates of misbehavior, poverty, or special education participation among these populations.

Likelihood of Expulsion for the Same Behavior Compared to White and Higher SES Students*			
	Black	Latino	Free and Reduced Lunch
2011-2012	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
2010-2011	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
2009-2010	Not significant	Not significant	43%
2008-2009	Not significant	Not significant	53%

\*These analyses ruled out other factors that contribute to suspensions and expulsions, like a students’ special education status, the reason for their office disciplinary referral, and the demographics of the school. See appendix for full results.

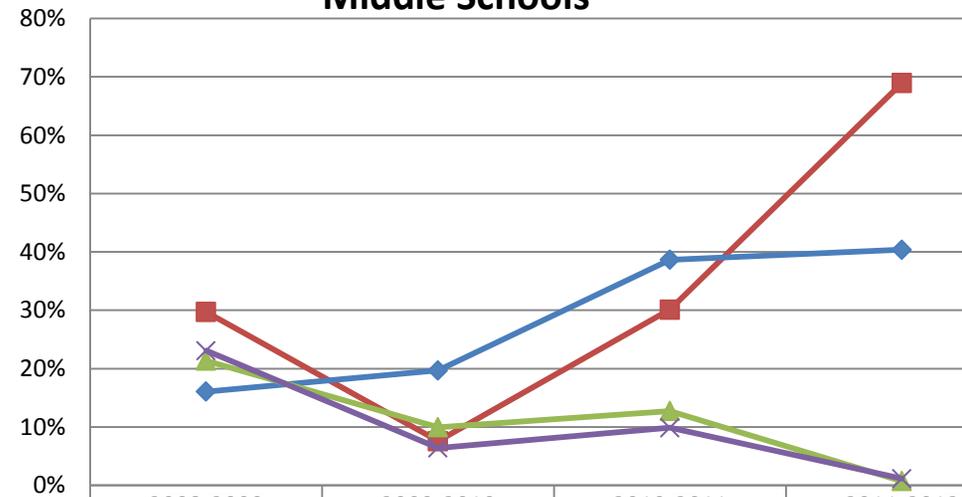
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### Elementary Schools



	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Black	0%	2%	55%	26%
Latino	16%	11%	32%	12%
FRL	3%	9%	1%	4%
Gender	61%	23%	42%	38%

### Middle Schools



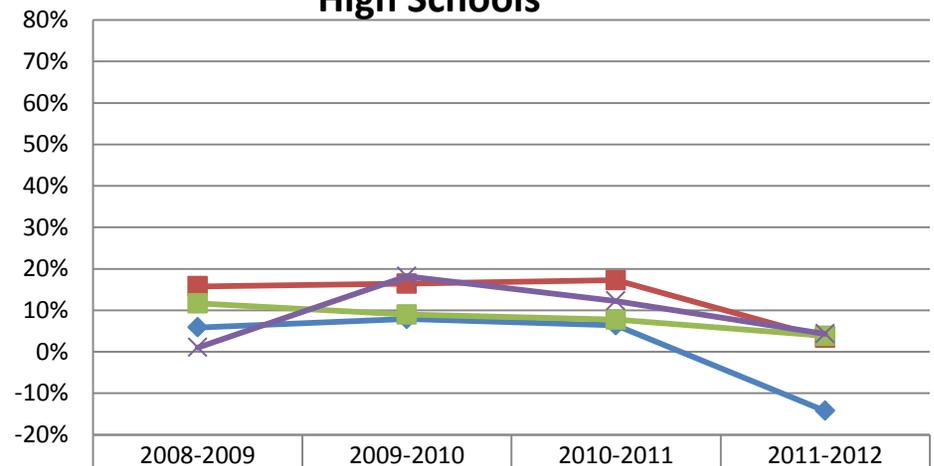
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Black	30%	8%	30%	69%
Latino	16%	20%	39%	40%
FRL	21%	10%	13%	1%
Gender	23%	6%	10%	1%

### Disparities in Suspension Decisions by Grade Level

- Over the past four years, *high schools* have substantially reduced the effect of race, class and gender on discipline consequences.\* In 2011-2012, Black and Latino high school students were not more likely than White students to be suspended for the same office referral reasons.
  - This finding should not be interpreted to mean that race doesn't influence suspension patterns in high schools. As long as student of color are more likely to be sent to the office, they will still be overrepresented in suspensions.
- Elementary and middle schools* have not seen the same reductions and appear to be driving racial disparities district-wide.

\*These analyses ruled out other factors that contribute to office referrals and suspensions, like a students' gender, free and reduced lunch status (poverty) special education status, and the demographics of the school. See appendix for full results

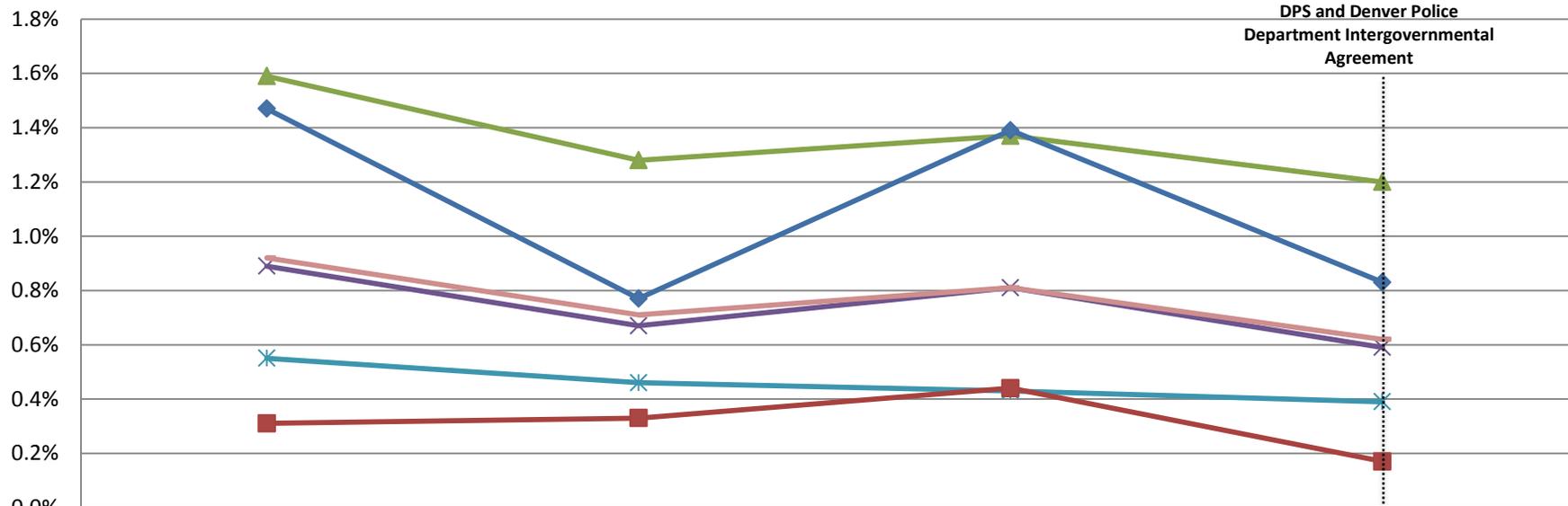
### High Schools



	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Black	16%	16%	17%	3%
Latino	6%	8%	6%	-14%
FRL	12%	9%	8%	4%
Gender	1%	18%	12%	4%

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**% of Students Referred to Law Enforcement by Race: 2008-2012**



	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Black	1.6%	1.3%	1.4%	1.2%
Latino	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%	0.6%
Native	1.5%	0.8%	1.4%	0.8%
White	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Asian	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%
All	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%	0.6%

- Rates of law enforcement referrals are lower than they were at the passage of JK-R, but there is no clear trend over time.
- In statistical analyses that rule out other factors that influence law enforcement referrals, Black (26%) and Latino (29%) students are statistically significantly more likely than White students to be referred to law enforcement for the same behavior in the 2011-2012 school year (see appendix).

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Interventions that Protect Students from Out of School Suspension

- In the 2011-2012 school year, students who received **restorative approaches** (-16%)\* or an **in school suspension** (-46%) as the resolution to their discipline incident are significantly **less likely** than students who did not receive these services to have an out-of-school suspension (see appendix).\*\*
  - This finding indicates that RA and ISS are promising interventions that protect students against out-of-school suspensions and keep them in school.



*High school discipline building leaders report restorative approaches, therapeutic ISS rooms, and discipline prevention teams are the most effective ways to bring down suspensions. In the highest performing schools, restorative approaches are included in classroom management practices, prior to discipline problems, to build relationships with students.*

\*The effect size of RA cannot be directly compared to ISS. RA is not as widely implemented in DPS schools as ISS; so fewer students are included in the calculation of this effect.

\*\*These analyses ruled out other factors that contribute to suspensions, like a students' race, FRL status, gender, special education status, and the demographics of the school.

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**How to interpret the findings presented in this report.**

**What is a disparity? How is it different than disproportionality?**

- This report largely focuses on disparities. A disparity is a comparison of information about two different populations (e.g. Black students who were expelled compared to White students who were expelled). In this report, a disparity refers to the risk of a student from one racial, class or gender subgroup being referred to the offices, suspended, or expelled compared to a young person of another background.
- Disproportionality represents a comparison of information about one population (e.g. all Black students) to a subgroup of that same population (e.g. Black students who were suspended). In particular, disproportionality is an issue of the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a subgroup of youth, relative to their proportion of the general population.
- The concepts are related; for example, disproportionalities in suspension occur whenever a subgroup of students experiences disparities in office referrals or discipline consequences. In other words, disparities lead to disproportionalities.

**What does “more likely” mean?**

- Risk is the chance that something will occur. If you are flipping a coin, your “risk” for landing on tails is 50%, or 50 out of 100 times. If you are drawing a card from a deck, your “risk” of getting a spade is 25% or 25 out of 100 times.
- The term “more likely” is a comparison of risks. If you are playing a game where you can win by landing on tails in a coin flip, or pulling a spade from deck of cards, you are 100% (2 times) “more likely” to win if you flip a coin rather than pull a card.
- In the context of this report, “more likely” means the risk of referral, suspension, or expulsion in one group (e.g. Black students) is higher than the risk for another group. For example, in 2011-2012, Black students in DPS were 31% (0.3 times) more likely than White students to be suspended for the same behavior, after taking into account their socioeconomic status, special education eligibility, and gender. All racial groups should be equally likely to be suspended after you take into account these other risk factors.

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**Appendix: Full Results of Statistical Analyses for the 2011-2012 School Year**

<i>Multilevel model predicting odds of discipline resolutions in all Denver Public Schools (2011-2012)</i>								
	Office Referral (sample= 87,997)		Suspension (sample= 10,705)		Expulsion (sample=10,705)		Law Enforcement Referral (sample= 10,705)	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
<b>Student Level Demographics</b>								
Race (comparison group = White students)								
Latino	1.40***	(1.29, 1.52)	1.15	(.96, 1.39)	.97	(.33, 2.86)	1.59*	(1.20, 2.30)
Black	2.30***	(2.10, 2.51)	1.55***	(1.27, 1.89)	1.77	(.61, 5.19)	1.52*	(1.03, 2.23)
Native American	1.29*	(1.02, 1.64)	1.18	(.71, 1.99)			1.10	(.41, 2.96)
Asian	0.65***	(.54, .78)	.89	(.53, 1.48)	.96	(.09, 10.63)	.95	(.34, 2.63)
Multiracial	1.50***	(1.30, 1.74)	1.41*	(1.02, 1.96)	1.29	(.19, 8.69)	.74	(.34, 1.58)
Pacific Islander	1.12	(.67, 1.88)	.56	(.19, 1.69)			2.79	(.29, 26.94)
Gender (Male)	2.15***	(2.06, 2.26)	1.21***	(1.08, 1.34)	1.65	(.81, 3.36)	1.02	(.82, 1.27)
Eligible for Free or Red. Lunch	2.37***	(2.22, 2.52)	1.05	(.90, 1.22)	.66	(.31, 3.40)	.88	(.66, 1.17)
Homeless	1.28***	(1.13, 1.44)	.94	(.74, 1.20)	.95	(.26, 3.40)	1.17	(.71, 1.93)
English Proficiency	1.72***	(1.62, 1.81)	1.13*	(1.00, 1.28)	1.30	(.58, 2.88)	1.31*	(1.01, 1.70)
Gifted and Talented	.70***	(.65, .76)	.85	(.71, 1.02)	.53	(.17, 1.69)	1.12	(.81, 1.55)
Special Education	1.49***	(1.40, 1.58)	1.17*	(1.02, 1.33)	.95	(.44, 2.02)	1.11	(.84, 1.45)
Emotional Disability	4.30***	(3.64, 5.09)	2.48***	(1.85, 3.32)	.57	(.12, 2.63)	1.35	(.82, 2.22)
<b>Top Referral Reasons</b>								
Bullying			2.55***	(2.11, 3.07)	1.47	(.51, 4.25)	1.46*	(1.00, 2.14)
Destruction of school property			2.78***	(1.94, 4.00)	.74	(.08, 6.53)	.82	(.39, 1.75)
Disobedient/defiant			3.08***	(2.70, 3.50)	1.26	(.66, 2.41)	1.09	(.87, 1.37)
Other code of conduct violation			3.25***	(2.79, 3.77)	.69	(.32, 1.46)	2.64***	(2.08, 3.36)
Detrimental behavior			6.14***	(5.37, 7.02)	.84	(.44, 1.61)	2.13***	(1.67, 2.71)
Third degree assault			19.82***	(13.27, 29.61)	7.89***	(2.67, 23.89)	9.66***	(5.75, 16.22)
First degree assault			3.16	(.64, 15.69)	365.80***	(37.6, 3554.5)	10.19**	(1.62, 63.87)
Drug possession or distribution			27.17***	(20.67, 35.73)	8.00***	(3.64, 17.57)	10.65***	(8.17, 13.88)
Dangerous Weapon			11.86***	(7.66, 18.37)	98.74***	(46.02, 211.9)	20.16***	(12.33, 32.94)
Statistical significance: *p< .05; **p <.01; ***p < .001								

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Continued...	Office Referral (sample= 87,997)		Suspension (sample= 10,705)		Expulsion (sample= 10,705)		Law Enforcement Referral (sample= 10,705)	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
<b>Resolutions</b>								
In school suspension			.37***	(.33, .42)	.79	(.39, 1.60)	.85	(.66, 1.08)
Restorative justice			.73**	(.57, .92)	1.77	(.51, 6.19)	1.08	(.74, 1.58)
Behavior contract			18.10***	(12.0, 27.3)	1.56	(.57, 4.23)	2.30***	(1.61, 3.29)
Referred to law enforcement			7.81***	(5.62, 10.86)	8.61	(4.08, 18.16)		
<b>School Level Controls</b>								
Middle School (vs. all others)	3.87***	(2.34, 6.38)	1.61	(.89, 2.90)	3.45**	(1.34, 8.87)	2.30	(.90, 5.90)
% Black	6.06**	(1.63, 22.49)	17.25***	(3.38, 88.02)	1.29	(.02, 71.02)	.15	(.01, 3.05)
% Latino	2.84**	(1.37, 5.91)	5.31***	(2.06, 13.69)	.57	(.05, 6.28)	.29	(.05, 1.63)
Statistical significance: *p< .05; **p <.01; ***p < .001								