Module 1: Introduction to School Discipline
Teaching the Social Curriculum: School Discipline as Instruction

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Abstract: Though less explicit than the academic curriculum, the expectations, rules, and consequences that form the social curriculum of schools are no less important in determining school success. Methods of discipline that emphasize school removal have not yielded evidence of effectiveness in teaching appropriate behavior or ensuring safe and effective school climates. In contrast, reviews have consistently identified preventive, collaborative, and instructional methods as effective or promising in reducing school violence or disruption. One effort to increase the implementation of effective instructional methods of school discipline and the promising results from the 1st year of implementation are described. First-year results from that program provide some evidence that school discipline need not be equated with punishment and exclusion.

Key words: at-risk students, interventions, school discipline, social curriculum, student behavior

Discipline. Its most typical current meaning seems to be most associated with the notion of bringing children into line. It conjures up long-standing associations with not sparing the rod. More recently, discipline is often viewed as synonymous with zero tolerance—punishing all misbehavior severely in order to send a message to potential troublemakers. School suspension is in fact the most commonly used form of school discipline (Skiba & Knesting, 2002), and the use of suspension and expulsion has increased substantially since the advent of zero tolerance (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). Thus, discipline in common parlance seems to involve the use of punishment, most often school exclusion, to enforce student conformance with established standards, as expressed by school discipline codes.

Yet the derivation of the term discipline suggests a meaning far different from our common understanding. The word discipline comes from the same Latin root as the word disciple: discipere, to teach or comprehend. Thus it makes sense to examine the effectiveness of school discipline as an instructional method. How well do suspension, expulsion, and the preventive alternatives proposed in place of those measures actually teach appropriate behavior in schools? Do students learn new, prosocial behavior or better comprehend how to conform their behavio
ior to school standards as a result of the application of school discipline? In this article we examine school discipline as an instructional method. Before that review, however, it may be useful to explore the subject matter that discipline intends to teach, the social curriculum.

**What Is the Social Curriculum?**

In every school and classroom, there is a social curriculum that acts as a guide for student behavior throughout the school day. Though rarely as explicit as the written materials that constitute the academic curriculum, it is no less important in determining whether a student succeeds. As shown in Figure 1, schools and teachers constantly make their expectations known to students through verbal explanations, rules, and consequences. Verbal explanations of expectations are an important source of information for students, and effective teachers spend a good deal of time at the beginning of the school year clarifying their expectations (Emmer, Everton, & Anderson, 1980). Classroom and school rules, especially when written, function as an explicit outline for students of classroom expectations (Emmer & Siough, 2001). Finally, students learn about teacher expectations on a daily basis through the responses they receive for positive and inappropriate behavior (Sprick & Nolet, 1991). In a well-run classroom, these three components work together to teach students how they should behave in order to succeed in the classroom. In hundreds of interactions a day, the correspondence between expectations, rules, and consequences allows students to learn each classroom’s unique social curriculum.

In less well-managed classrooms and schools, inconsistency among expectations, rules, and consequences provides less opportunity for learning the implicit expectations of the social curriculum and may even give students conflicting messages about the appropriate way to behave in a given classroom or school situation. Teacher expectations that the classroom will be an engaging learning environment stressing student initiative may be contradicted by an authoritarian or demeaning disciplinary style. Disciplinary responses that are inconsistent with written rules or are unfair to certain students (see section on minority disproportionality in discipline) may give students the message that what those in authority say is not as important as what they do.

For students who are sufficiently good observers, even consequences that are inconsistent with stated rules provide valuable information about the “real rules” of the classroom. The first author once observed a resource room with the posted rule, “Raise hand before speaking.” Yet the teacher in that room also appreciated spontaneous discussion, and as the discussion became more animated she would allow students to speak freely without first raising their hands. When the discussion became unruly, however, she reminded students of the rule, at which point they returned to raising their hands. In contrast to the written rule, then, the implicit rule that students had apparently learned was, “Raise hand before speaking, unless we are having a really good discussion, in which case you don’t need to raise your hand, at least until things get out of hand, in which case return to raising your hand.”

**Who Needs Instruction in the Social Curriculum?**

Which students are likely to benefit from instruction in the social curriculum? The brief answer is that although there are clearly some children who need extensive social instruction, all children may need some social instruction regarding some issues.

The majority of students come to school with the ability to recognize teacher expectations and succeed in adapting their behavior to fit the classroom, regardless of how well those expectations are presented. Social learning theorist Walter Mischel (1973) sug-
gested that most of us have a very finely developed sense of how unstated social rules change from situation to situation, and we can make the subtle shifts necessary to match our responses to those changes. He argued that this situation-specificity of behavior is in fact a hallmark of adaptive behavior.

For students who exhibit behavior problems, however, learning the social curriculum is by no means an automatic process. These students come into the classroom with perceptions and beliefs that have grown out of their experience that may leave them less capable of recognizing and responding to the typical social curriculum of schools. The literature in the field of conduct disorders illustrates how this process might operate. First, children who display noncompliant, aggressive, or antisocial behavior are often the victims of coercive interchanges in their family (Patterson, 1992) that have taught them that the most effective way to avoid abuse is to become increasingly abusive themselves. Second, in the face of extreme parental inconsistency, some children learn to act out to establish the limits, even if it means exposing themselves to harsh punishment (Wahler, Williams, & Cerezo, 1990). Third, perhaps as a result of unsafe or threatening home and community conditions, children with conduct disorders develop an antisocial cognitive set, striking first and asking questions later (Dodge, 1993). Finally, well-documented links between antisocial behavior and academic underachievement (Hindshaw, 1992) suggest that, as the difficulty of academic material increases, students with behavior problems will turn to off-task and disruptive behavior in order to escape from academic demands (Center, Deitz, & Kaufman, 1982).

It is not hard to see how exposure to these risk factors could leave a child with a very different understanding of “how the world works.” Students who have experienced coercive family cycles may view a teacher request for compliance as just the beginning of a long battle that they need to resist as quickly and firmly as possible. When faced with unstructured classroom situations, children from inconsistent home environments may act out in order to understand the limits of their environment. Students who experience a daily personal threat in their home or community may strike out first in ambiguous social situations in order to avoid becoming the victims of aggression. Finally, in school settings where academic performance is the yardstick of worth, students with a history of academic failure may strive not to complete work, but to avoid any situation that may expose them to others as “dumb.”

Thus, the experiences of students at risk for behavior problems leave them with social perceptions that are a poor fit with the standard expectations of most school environments. Arising from these experiences and perceptions, the behavior of these students appears disruptive, irresponsible, or incomprehensible to teachers and administrators. But to the student whose experience has yielded a different set of social expectations, these behaviors may seem perfectly sensible, and in fact the only alternative. Our consequences, however rational they may appear to us, may seem highly unfair to those students, because they are acting in the only way they can, in accord with the only world they know. Without explicit instruction in the expectations of the social curriculum, it is highly likely that these students will fail both socially and academically.

Although some students have a particular need for explicit instruction in social competencies, it is probably also true that all students need some instruction in some skills at some point. The violence that pervades our culture through the media has been linked with increased levels of negative and aggressive interactions among both children and adolescents (Paik & Comstock, 1994). Surveys of high school students reveal a startlingly high proportion who are unaware of effective methods for solving social conflict (Opotow, 1991). Instruction for all students in the social curriculum may thus help address widespread misperceptions among today’s youth about the nature of conflict and problem solving.

**How Well Does Disciplinary Removal Work?**

In this light, it is appropriate to ask how effective disciplinary removal is in teaching students the behaviors they need to succeed in school. There is a growing body of literature on the effects of suspension and expulsion. The following sections briefly summarize that literature in the areas of treatment integrity and consistency, nondiscriminatory practice, and outcomes.

**Treatment Integrity**

The extent to which an intervention is implemented as planned has been labeled variously treatment integrity (Noell, Gresham, & Gansle, 2002), quality of implementation (Gottfredson et al., 2000), and treatment fidelity (Elliott, Hatot, Sirotvaka, & Potter, 2001). Unless an intervention can be implemented with some degree of consistency, it is impossible to attribute any changes in school climate or student behavior to that intervention.

For traditional disciplinary interventions, the most important indicator of quality of implementation is most likely consistency, the extent to which disciplinary removal is based on student behavior. Although one can assume that discipline policies will vary somewhat from school to school, it is also reasonable to expect that students will be disciplined primarily in response to their behavior, not because of characteristics of their school or classroom, such as ineffective classroom management or school climate.

Although student behavior and attitudes do contribute to disciplinary decisions (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982), it is clear that student characteristics tell only part of the story of school suspension. Certain classrooms are more likely to be responsible for a disproportionate share of referrals to the office (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). A number of school factors also contribute to rates of school suspension. Wu et al. (1982) reported that school characteristics, such as overall suspension rate, teacher attitudes, administrative centralization, quality of school governance, teacher perception of student achievement, and racial makeup of the school appear to be more strongly predictive of school suspension than student attitudes and behavior.

It is not surprising, then, that studies across schools in a single district (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Skiba et al., 1997) have found that the extent of disciplinary removal is extremely incon-
sistent from school to school. Given the previously noted contributions of school and classroom characteristics to the rate of suspension and expulsion, school factors probably account for some if not most of this inconsistency. Ultimately, then, one must assume that the quality of implementation of school exclusion as a disciplinary tool is low.

Nondiscriminatory Practice

Both special education regulations and federal education policy prohibit discrimination in the application or outcomes of educational interventions. The right not to be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin is explicitly guaranteed by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Browne, Losen, & Wald 2002).

Yet disciplinary exclusion has consistently led to school punishments that fall disproportionately on students of color. For over 25 years, in national-, state-, district-, and building-level data, students of color have been found to be suspended at rates two to three times that of other students, and similarly overrepresented in office referrals, corporal punishment, and school expulsion (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, in press). These disparities cannot be accounted for by the lower economic status of minority students: Minority overrepresentation in school punishment remains significant, for example, even after statistically controlling for socioeconomic status (Skiba et al., in press; Wu et al., 1982). Furthermore, there is no evidence that African American students somehow "deserve" disproportionate rates of discipline because of higher rates of misbehavior. African American students have been found to be punished for less severe rule violations than White students (Shaw & Braden, 1990), or punished more severely than others committing the same offense (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992). Skiba et al. (in press) found that office referrals of African American middle-school students tended to be based more on behaviors requiring a higher degree of subjective judgment (e.g., loitering, disrespect).

It would thus be hard to argue that disciplinary removal constitutes nondiscriminatory practice. Rather, these findings appear to fit the criteria that Wu et al. (1982) proposed as evidence of racial discrimination in discipline: "either (1) a disciplinary practice that is favorable to one group and unfavorable to another (e.g., regarding hat wearing by Black males as disrespectful behavior: an ethnocentric view of cultural difference), or (2) unequal treatment of the same behavior" (p. 268). Together with findings that racial disproportionality in suspension increases in schools that use suspension more (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986), these data make a case that the use, and especially the overuse, of disciplinary removal carries with it an inherent risk of racial bias.

Outcomes of Disciplinary Removal

Disciplinary removal could be judged an effective educational or behavioral intervention if it led to improvements in either (a) individual rates of disruptive or violent behavior or (b) overall school safety or school climate. As yet, there is no evidence that disciplinary removal meets either of these criteria. Indeed, what we know about the effects and effectiveness of school exclusion raises acute concerns regarding its efficacy.

Improved student behavior? Studies of suspension have consistently documented that a high proportion of students suspended from school are repeat offenders (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986), suggesting that this segment of the school population is decidedly not "getting the message" that disciplinary removal intends to teach. Tobin et al. (1996) concluded that, for some students, "suspension functions as a reinforcer . . . rather than as a punisher" (p. 91). In the long term, school suspension is associated with increased rates of school dropout (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Indeed, some schools appear to use suspension for "pushout"—suspending certain students repeatedly as a means of cleansing the school of persistent troublemakers who challenge school authority (Bowditch, 1993; Fine, 1986). For the at-risk or challenging students most often targeted for disciplinary removal, then, suspension and expulsion seem primarily to increase the risk of disruption, and eventually dropout and delinquency.

Improved school climate? Rather than making a contribution to school safety, the increased use of suspension and expulsion seems to be associated with student and teacher perceptions of a less effective and inviting school climate. Schools with higher rates of suspension have been reported to have higher student–teacher ratios and a lower level of academic quality (Hellman & Beaton, 1986), spend more time on discipline-related matters (Davis & Jordan, 1994), and pay significantly less attention to issues of school climate (Bickel & Qualls, 1980). Wu et al. (1982) found that less satisfactory school governance was a significant predictor of the probability of a student being suspended at least once in his or her school career.

Summary: The Ineffectiveness of Disciplinary Removal

Thus, the answer to the question "Is disciplinary removal an effective method for teaching students the social behaviors they need to succeed in school?" is a clear and resounding no. Without consistent and quality implementation, it is highly unlikely that disciplinary exclusion could be effective in changing student behavior. Furthermore, zero tolerance suspensions and expulsions consistently yield racial disproportionality that may violate students' rights to nondiscriminatory educational practice. Finally, far from improving student behavior or ensuring school safety, disciplinary exclusion appears to be associated with a host of negative outcomes for both students and the school climate.

Are There Effective Alternatives to Disciplinary Removal?

Clearly, school administrators do not remove students from school because they enjoy doing so. Rather, schools and school districts that suspend and expel more students than they wish to probably do so simply because they do not know what else to do.

In fact, however, there are a number of preventive alternatives that have been found to be effective in improving school discipline and reducing school disruption and violence. These studies have been
conducted by government panels or individual reviewers using highly rigorous criteria (e.g., Elliott, Hatot, Sirovatka, & Potter, 2001; Gagnon & Leone, 2002; Gottfredson, 1997; Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, Fagan, & Hansen, 2001; Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, & Baer, 2000). The results of these reviews have been remarkably consistent in identifying those programs that appear to have the strongest empirical support for their effectiveness. The results of three of those reports are presented below.


As part of an independent evaluation of federalally supported crime prevention efforts, Gottfredson (1997) reviewed 149 studies of school-based prevention programs. On the basis of criteria of at least two studies finding positive effects and the weight of evidence in a positive direction, Gottfredson concluded that the most effective strategies were programs that

- Build the school capacity to initiate and sustain innovation;
- Establish and consistently enforce school rules, particularly when positively framed, and communicate norms through schoolwide campaigns;
- Teach social competency skills (e.g., self-control, social problem solving, communication skills), especially over a long period of time.

A second set of studies were regarded as promising, including smaller groupings of students (e.g., "schools-within-schools"), behavior modification procedures, and teaching "thinking skills" to high-risk youth. To encourage increased implementation of effective programs, the researchers recommended increased attention to building a theory base for school-based prevention, and building a better understanding of the school factors that impede the implementation of prevention strategies.

Blueprints for Violence Prevention

The Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative (Mihalic et al., 2001), supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), has sought to identify and encourage replication of effective programs for youth violence prevention. The initiative relied on a panel of national experts in the field of violence prevention to identify 11 model programs or "Blueprints." The panel used a number of criteria to select programs, including evidence of a deterrent effect, as shown with a strong research design, an effect lasting at least 1 year beyond treatment, at least one successful replication, and data on the program's cost effectiveness. Among the programs that met the criteria to be identified as Blueprint programs were school-wide bullying prevention (Olweus & Limber, 1999), mentoring through Big Brothers and Big Sisters (McGill, Mihalic, & Grotopeter, 1998), and the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies program (Greenberg, Kusche, & Mihalic, 1998)—a school-based program to promote emotional competence.

Currently, the Blueprints Initiative is assisting in the dissemination of these programs, and documenting barriers to implementation in 112 sites involving 290 schools (Mihalic et al., 2001). Early results have identified four factors that are important in ensuring treatment fidelity, including a local needs assessment, adequate buy-in at the local level, adequate resources to support training and materials for the program, and a strong local commitment to high quality and complete implementation.

Youth Violence: Report of the U.S. Surgeon General

At the urging of Congress and the Clinton administration, the U.S. Surgeon General requested the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to prepare a report on youth violence in the United States. The resulting report (Elliott et al., 2001) summarizes the current status of knowledge in the field of youth violence.

The Surgeon General's report reviewed the findings of a number of previous reports to identify best practices in youth violence prevention—"what works, what is promising, and what doesn't work." Standards used in judging the quality of programs included rigor of experimental design, replication of the results, extent of statistical significance, and long-term changes in individual competencies, environmental conditions, and patterns of behavior. Among the programs identified as effective or promising by the Surgeon General were the Seattle Social Development project combining teacher and parent training (Hawkins, Von Cleve, & Catalano, 1991), and interpersonal problem-solving training for students (Shure & Spivack, 1982).

Summary: What Works in Teaching Appropriate Behavior

The effective strategies and programs identified by the previously mentioned researchers, such as improved classroom management and instruction in social competencies, represent the emergence of a new perspective on school discipline and violence prevention. In contrast to what we know about suspension and expulsion, these strategies have produced solid evidence of success in improving student behavior and school climate. Many of the most effective strategies have provided some evidence concerning treatment fidelity, although further study of school-based implementation is clearly needed. Finally, in contrast to disciplinary removal, at least some of these strategies have been shown to be effective in improving outcomes in urban, predominantly minority settings (Hammond & Yung, 1991).

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project: Schoolwide Planning for Instruction in the Social Curriculum

If discipline can be defined as teaching students the behaviors that they need in order to succeed socially in school, disciplinary removal has proven to be an ineffective tool for reaching that goal. Rather, an alternate perspective, stressing instruction and prevention, appears to hold greater promise for teaching students appropriate prosocial behavior. The challenge in putting that perspective into practice is to find effective methods of implementing research-based practices in school discipline and school violence prevention.

The Safe and Responsive Schools project (SRS), funded by a 3-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office...
of Special Education Programs, has sought to enable schools and school districts to develop a broader perspective on school safety, stressing comprehensive planning, prevention, and parent and community involvement. The goals of the project have been to increase the knowledge base of teachers and administrators concerning what works in discipline and violence prevention and to develop a comprehensive model of systems change in school discipline. Working from a three-tiered primary prevention model, the SRS project has been implemented in rural, suburban, and urban schools in two states to assist them in developing school safety plans.1

Over their 1st year of involvement in the project, participating schools formed Safe and Responsive School Teams that engaged in a year-long needs assessment process, surveying students, teachers, and parents, and conducting an inventory of their available resources and strategies for violence prevention. At the same time, teams reviewed the knowledge base concerning best practice in discipline and violence prevention in schools, including fact sheets on a variety of topics prepared by project staff. By the end of their 1st year, the teams used the information they had gathered to engage in a strategic planning process culminating in the development of a comprehensive Safe and Responsive School Plan. Those plans were implemented and evaluated in the 2nd and 3rd year of the project. As can be seen in Table 1, the plans developed by participating schools showed remarkable diversity, reflecting the unique needs of each school.

Evaluation data after 1 year of implementation of the school plans are highly encouraging. Table 2 shows that among the first five pilot schools in the state of Indiana, out-of-school suspensions for the entire school showed a decline ranging from 40% to 60%. Gains extended as well to students with disabilities. One middle school showed a drop from 39 suspensions for students with disabilities in 1999–2000 to 0 in 2000–2001.

It is instructive to highlight the experience of one participating school: Owen Valley High School in rural Spencer, Indiana. During its planning year, the team identified as one of its major problems the

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**TABLE 1**

New Programs Implemented in SRS Schools as a Result of Project Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Key components of safe and responsive schools plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owen Valley High School</td>
<td>Intervention Room—Students are referred to the Intervention Room for classroom behavior problems prior to office referral</td>
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<td>Classroom Management Training—Workshop in August (before school year) for all faculty members featuring national school discipline expert</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owen Valley Middle School</td>
<td>Safe Schools TV Show—Videotaped role plays and lessons broadcast over school’s closed circuit television system, including anger management and conflict resolution; based on “Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum”</td>
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<tr>
<td>McCormick’s Creek</td>
<td>LifeSkills—Faculty generated list of 10 key social skills taught to students once per week during class; rewards provided for students who display the life skill of the week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Curriculum—Nationally validated conflict resolution curriculum taught to all students once a week during class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edgewood High School</td>
<td>Civility Themes—School activities and events revolve around a selected theme; currently under development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension—Coordinated with local juvenile justice agency; habitually suspended students attend alternative placement during suspension rather than being suspended to home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edgewood Junior High School</td>
<td>The Code—Consists of four principles to guide student behavior; students exhibiting code-following behavior are nominated by teachers and receive school wide recognition, including a postcard sent home and writing their name on the “Wall of Fame”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beatrice High School</td>
<td>Civility Curriculum—Curriculum being taught to all students during Home Economics; developed to uphold principles of the Code</td>
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<td>Out of Classroom Intervention (OCI)—cool-down time for students instead of office referral; students complete problem-solving form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cedar and Lincoln</td>
<td>Bullying Prevention—Nationally renowned bullying expert presented several workshops on the topic of bullying; distributed bullying survey; bullying prevention and awareness week at each school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools</td>
<td>Resource Book—Collection of community resources including information on health care, support agencies, and hotlines; copies available at each building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoddard and Paddock</td>
<td>Mentoring Program—High school students paired with elementary students who may benefit from a mentoring relationship; support and training provided to mentors Lane Elementary Schools</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
tremendous numbers of referrals to the office, especially for minor misbehavior. School staff commented on a line of chairs outside the office in which students lined up to see administrators for their referrals. To respond to this issue, the school team developed an innovative new program called the Intervention Room. Staffed by both a general education teacher and a special education teacher, the Intervention Room functions in part as a resource room for students with disabilities who need academic assistance, but more importantly, as an option for teachers for disruptive students, both disabled and nondisabled, prior to office referral. Students referred to the intervention room for behavioral issues first meet with the intervention room teachers. Sometimes a simple problem, such as lack of materials, can be solved and the student can return immediately to his or her classroom. In cases of more substantial conflict, intervention room teachers process the incident with the student, attempt to help the student take responsibility for his or her behavior, and assist the student in returning to the classroom with a plan for avoiding future problems.

SRS team members at Owen Valley High School attribute many of the changes in their disciplinary data to the Intervention Room and note that there is no longer a row of chairs lined up outside the main office. Finally, these improvements reflect a relationship between positive discipline and academic excellence: In the 2001–2002 school year, Owen Valley High School was one of six schools in the nation that won the prestigious New American High School Award from the U.S. Department of Education in recognition for its reform efforts and increased academic excellence.

Conclusions

These data provide a hopeful sign that it is possible to develop a system of discipline that is not dependent on cessation of educational opportunity through disciplinary removal, but relies instead on prevention, instruction, and an appropriate continuum of effective responses. The data are also consistent with findings of national panels whose rigorous criteria identified programs that rely on instruction, collaboration, and prevention rather than exclusion and punishment.

An instructional approach to school discipline reflects the consistent findings of behavioral and cognitive psychology concerning which procedures are most likely to be effective in producing student learning. Extensive study of negative consequences has shown that punishment, especially punishment alone, cannot teach new behavior (Counsel for Exceptional Children, 1991; Skinner, 1953). In order to be effective, punishment requires a degree of control of situational variables that is unlikely to be achieved in most school settings. Without such control, the side effects of punishment—escape, habituation, and counter-aggression (Axelrod & Apsehe, 1983)—will in all likelihood swamp any possible behavioral gains. In contrast, process—product research has identified a host of instructional and management strategies that are associated with positive academic outcomes. There is no reason why effective instructional strategies such as advanced organizers, direct instruction, or feedback and corrections (Slavin, 2000) that have been shown to improve academic outcomes cannot also be used to instruct students in the social expectations of classrooms and schools. In short, teaching the social curriculum is simply drawing upon our best knowledge in order to teach our children the behaviors they need to be successful in school and in life.

NOTE

Further information about the project can be found on the Safe and Responsive Schools website: www.indiana.edu/~safesch.

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Parsing Disciplinary Disproportionality: Contributions of Infraction, Student, and School Characteristics to Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion

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In the context of a national conversation about exclusionary discipline, we conducted a multilevel examination of the relative contributions of infraction, student, and school characteristics to rates of and racial disparities in out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Type of infraction; race, gender, and to a certain extent socioeconomic status at the individual level; and, at the school level, mean school achievement, percentage Black enrollment, and principal perspectives all contributed to the probability of out-of-school suspension or expulsion. For racial disparities, however, school-level variables, including principal perspectives on discipline, appear to be among the strongest predictors. Such a pattern suggests that schools and districts looking to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in discipline would do well to focus on school- and classroom-based interventions.

KEYWORDS: disciplinary disparities, disproportionality, expulsion, out-of-school suspension, school discipline

School exclusion—out-of-school suspension and expulsion—remains a substantial component of discipline in our nation’s schools. Some studies have suggested that almost a third of all students may experience an out-of-school suspension or expulsion at some point in their school career (Fabelo et al., 2011). The use of exclusionary discipline in schools continues...
to increase, especially for African American students (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Particularly for out-of-school suspension, the use of the procedure is not restricted to serious or dangerous behavior, but rather appears to be most commonly used for more interactive day-to-day disruptions, especially defiance and noncompliance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011).

The use of school exclusion as a disciplinary tool appears to carry with it substantial risk for both short- and long-term negative outcomes. At the school level, rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion have consistently been found to be associated with perceptions of a more negative school climate (Bickel & Qualls, 1980; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2013; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008), especially for students of color (Mattison & Aber, 2007). School exclusion through suspension and expulsion is associated with lower academic achievement at both the school level (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Rausch & Skiba, 2005) and the individual
level (Arcia, 2006; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Rocque, 2010), as well as increased risk of negative behavior over time (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). In terms of longer term outcomes, suspension is a significant correlate of school dropout or failure to graduate on time at both the individual level (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Suh & Suh, 2007) and the school level (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). Finally, exclusionary discipline appears to be associated with increased risk of juvenile justice involvement. Controlling for 83 demographic and school-level variables, Fabelo et al. (2011) reported that suspension and expulsion for a discretionary school violation nearly tripled a student’s likelihood of juvenile justice contact within the subsequent year.

Such outcomes have put out-of-school suspension and expulsion in the center of a national dialogue on school discipline. Professional associations such as the American Psychological Association (2008) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013) have issued reports on the ineffectiveness of and risks associated with disciplinary exclusion and have recommended the use of such measures only as a last resort. Major urban school districts such as the Los Angeles Unified School District (Jones, 2013) and Broward County, Florida (Alvarez, 2013), have revised their codes of conduct to focus on preventive alternatives to suspension and expulsion. At the federal level, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education undertook a national initiative to support reform in school discipline practices that has resulted in new federal guidance aimed at reducing the use of suspension and expulsion and racial/ethnic disparities in rates of those measures and have recommended a variety of resources focused on improving school climate (U.S. Department of Education/Department of Justice 2014). Thus, there appears to be considerable momentum in policy discussion for considering disciplinary practices that could serve as alternatives to out-of-school suspension and expulsion and a concomitant need to better understand the factors that contribute to current levels of suspension and expulsion.

The path in any particular school disciplinary incident from student misbehavior to administrative consequences such as school exclusion represents a complex and multi-determined process (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). One would expect disproportionality in discipline to be likewise complex, the result of interactions between the type or frequency of behavior exhibited, characteristics of students, and characteristics of the school. Although multilevel studies have begun to examine the contribution of student and teacher characteristics (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) or student and school characteristics (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011) to disciplinary outcomes, there has not yet been a study that has simultaneously considered the contributions by infraction type, student characteristics, and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Such a study would be extremely important in the current national dialogue seeking alternatives to exclusionary discipline.
If the primary determinants of rates of suspension and expulsion, and disproportionality in those outcomes, are found in the severity of infraction or individual student characteristics, reducing rates of out-of-school discipline might well be predicated upon interventions addressing the behavioral characteristics of individual students. On the other hand, findings that alterable variables at the school level represent a significant contributor to rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion would support recommendations and resources directed at changing the policies, practices, and procedures of schools with respect to discipline.

A reasonable assumption, and our operating hypothesis in this investigation, is that the use of the more severe disciplinary consequences of out-of-school suspension and expulsion would be a complex function of variables at all three levels. The purpose of this article, then, is to apply multilevel modeling in order to specify the contributions of infraction type, student demographic characteristics, and school-level variables to the probability of receiving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion at the administrative level. Our assumption is that the results of such an analysis will have significant implications for resource distribution decisions in the context of school discipline reform.

The Multiply Determined Nature of School Discipline

Previous literature indicates that characteristics of behavior, students, and schools all contribute to school discipline outcomes. The following review examines the literature regarding the contributions of each of these dimensions in turn.

Type of Disciplinary Infraction

At first glance, the use of out-of-school suspension appears to be scaled to the severity of student behavior. Both surveys of administrators (Costenbader & Markson, 1994, 1998; Imich, 1994) and analysis of actual office disciplinary referrals (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997) indicate that the offense most likely to result in out-of-school suspension is fighting or aggression. Recent research clearly indicates that the probability that suspension and expulsion will be applied appears to increase in proportion to the perceived seriousness of the offense. In a national sample of office disciplinary referrals and consequences, Skiba et al. (2011) reported that the odds of being suspended or expelled for safety threatening or criminal infractions such as use and possession of drugs or weapons or assault were much higher than for infractions such as disruption or noncompliance.

Yet since suspension is among the most widely used disciplinary techniques, and is used in response to a wide range of student behaviors (Skiba et al., 1997), the use of out-of-school suspension is not restricted to serious, safety-threatening behaviors, but is rather distributed across a wide range of...
infractions. The majority of offenses for which students are suspended appear to be nonviolent, less disruptive offenses (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). The data consistently show that students are suspended most frequently for minor to moderate infractions such as disobedience and disrespect (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Cooley, 1995; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 1997), defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), attendance problems (Morgan-D’Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996; Richart, Brooks, & Soler, 2003), failing to report to detention (Rosen, 1997), and general classroom disruption (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Skiba et al., 1997).

While the scaling of suspension in proportion to severity of behavior seems at odds with findings that out-of-school suspension also appears to be used somewhat indiscriminately, these findings are probably less paradoxical than they appear. It is clearly the case that safety-threatening or criminal behaviors lead more reliably to school exclusion. Yet it is also true that these most severe behaviors represent a small proportion of actual school behavior (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,234 school principals or disciplinarians to discover what they considered to be the most pervasive disciplinary problems in their schools. The most frequently cited problems at all school levels were less violent behaviors such as tardiness (40%) and absenteeism (25%). The most severe behaviors such as drug use and possession of a weapon were reported to occur only 9% and 2% of the time, respectively (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). Thus, although the odds for any single incident of minor or moderate misbehavior leading to a school suspension are lower, the sheer volume of more minor infractions, in concert with the more indiscriminate use of out-of-school suspension, ensures that a greater proportion of out-of-school suspension will occur in response to those more common infractions.

This analysis is supported by patterns in the use of school expulsion. Expulsion is applied in schools on a much less regular basis. While some studies have found suspension to be applied to one-third or more of office referrals, the use of expulsion is much more rare, perhaps occurring in as few as 1 in 1,000 incidents (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). As a result, expulsion appears to be used primarily in response to more seriously disruptive, violent, or criminal behavior (Heaviside et al., 1998).

Student Characteristics

The literature also suggests that particular student characteristics make students more likely to be disciplined. Some of these factors are behavioral or associated with personal characteristics that one might expect would
increase inappropriate behavior. Morgan-D’Atrio et al. (1996) reported that of students who were suspended, 43% at the high school level and 38% at the middle school level had clinically elevated scores on one or more student and teacher subscales of the Child Behavior Checklist (Quay, 1983). Eckenrode, Laird, and Doris (1993) reported that students with substantiated reports of abuse or neglect were significantly more likely to be referred for school discipline and somewhat more likely to be suspended, especially at the middle and high school level.

Yet there are a number of nonbehavioral, demographic characteristics that have also been found to be associated with increased likelihood of exclusionary discipline. Males have consistently been found to be suspended and expelled at higher rates than females (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Thornton & Trent, 1998; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982), representing 51% of the public school student population nationally but constituting 70% of out-of-school suspensions. In contrast, females comprise 49% of the student population but represent only 30% of suspensions (Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011). Males have been estimated as being disciplined at a rate between two (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003) and up to four times (Imich, 1994) higher than female students. It has been suggested that gender disproportionality could be accounted for by the fact that teachers may view boys as more defiant and disruptive than girls (Newcomb et al., 2002; Wentzel, 2002).

Poverty has also been found to be a consistent predictor of school discipline, with low socioeconomic status (SES) students receiving suspension and expulsion at a higher rate (Brantlinger, 1991; Nichols, 2004; Petras et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). A wide range of sociodemographic variables, including absence of father or mother and quality of home resources, have been found to be predictors of the likelihood of suspension (Hinojosa, 2008). Even controlling for levels of student aggression, Petras et al. (2011) discovered that students who live in poverty were still more likely to be removed from school.

Finally, research has been highly consistent in documenting disproportionate rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion for African American students (e.g., Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Gordon, Piana, & Kelecher, 2000; McFadden et al., 1992; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Petras et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2002). African American students are overrepresented in a range of school disciplinary outcomes, including classroom referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010), out-of-school suspension (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008), and zero tolerance–related expulsions (Tailor & Detch, 1998). Emerging research has also documented some evidence of disproportionality for other groups, including Latino students (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011), students
with disabilities (Losen & Gillespie, 2012), and LGBT students (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011). There is emerging data that Latino students may be underrepresented in exclusionary discipline at the elementary school level but overrepresented at the secondary level (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba et al., 2011).

While the association in American society between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; McLoyd, 1998) might bring one to infer that findings of racial disproportionality are primarily a by-product of disproportionality associated with SES (e.g., higher rates of disruptive behavior among poor students of color), the actual relationship between race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school discipline appears to be more complex. Multivariate analyses have consistently demonstrated that race remains a significant predictor of suspension and expulsion even after controlling for poverty (see e.g., Wallace et al., 2008; Wu et al., 1982). Nor has research supported the notion that higher rates of suspension and expulsion are due to higher rates of African American misbehavior. Analyzing one year of disciplinary data for urban middle schools, Skiba et al. (2002) found that White students were more often referred to the office for offenses that appear to be more objective—smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and obscene language—while African American students were referred more often for disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering, which are behaviors with more subjective connotations. Bradshaw et al. (2010) reported that African American students had significantly greater odds of receiving teacher-reported office disciplinary referrals even after controlling for those same teachers’ ratings of classroom behavior.

School Contributions

School disciplinary events are often viewed as a linear function of student behavior in both research and practice. Kinsler (2013) postulated that the school disciplinary process can be described as a choice model in which principals create a set of disciplinary regulations at the beginning of each school year, and students make choices about whether to engage in disruptions that determine whether they are referred to the office for a disciplinary infraction. Likewise, Sheets (1996) found that school personnel appear to assume that inappropriate student behavior sets in motion a predictable and relatively invariant sequence of disciplinary reaction meant to address the problems that misbehavior causes. In a process that is seen as driven by student behavior, disciplinary outcomes such as suspension and expulsion are thus perceived as direct indicators of the extent of student disruption.

In reality, however, the data suggest that school suspension or expulsion is the end point of a complex process that cannot be described as a straight line leading from student misbehavior to an invariant consequence delivered by the disciplinary system (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). Teacher judgments that a behavior is too severe to be handled at the classroom level are influenced
by a host of factors: a student’s disciplinary history, the immediate context of the behavior, the teacher’s general tolerance level and skill in behavior management, and the resources available to the teacher for managing disruptive behavior (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Such complexity led Morrison and her colleagues to describe school exclusion as a process rather than an event (Morrison et al., 2001). Both school and principal characteristics appear to play a significant role in that process and its outcomes.

There appears to be a high rate of variability in the use of disciplinary consequences by schools (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986), and some portion of that variability appears to be due to contextual variables that go beyond student characteristics. In an extensive multivariate analysis of a national data set, Wu et al. (1982) found that student attitude and behavior make a significant contribution to a student’s probability of being suspended from school. Yet contextual variables such as school governance, teacher attitudes, and degree of administrative centralization were also highly significant in predicting one’s chances of being suspended from school. Indeed, in the overall regression equation, classroom and school characteristics were more predictive of an individual’s probability of being suspended than were student attitudes and behavior.

Attitudinal variations on the part of principals also appear to have an impact on the rate of suspension and expulsion in schools. As part of a larger report on out-of-school suspension practices, the Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project (2000) found wide variation in the disciplinary philosophies of school principals within the same district, and rates of suspension in these schools that seemed to reflect principal attitude. Mukuria (2002) contrasted schools with high and low rates of suspension in urban, predominantly African American communities in the state of Louisiana, and found substantial differences in the attitudes expressed by administrators in high- versus low-suspending schools. Principals in low-suspending schools were more willing to bring issues of context into their decisions about consequences, while principals in schools with high suspension rates reported that they strictly adhered to district disciplinary policy without attending to circumstances. Principals in low-suspending schools were also more likely to express a clear philosophy and vision (e.g., a strong commitment to African American education) that guided their disciplinary policy. In a comprehensive study of the relationship of principal attitudes and disciplinary outcomes, Skiba, Edl, and Rausch (2007), surveying 325 principals regarding their attitudes toward zero tolerance, suspension and expulsion, and violence prevention strategies, reported an association between principal attitude toward discipline and school disciplinary outcomes. Rates of out-of-school suspension were significantly lower and the use of preventive measures more frequent at schools whose principals believed that suspension and expulsion were unnecessary given a positive school climate.
Skiba et al.

The overall rate of poverty of the school district appears to play a role in both the rate of discipline and in racial disparities in suspension and expulsion, but not always in the expected direction. Absolute rates of suspension appear to be highest in poor urban districts (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). Yet disparities between Black and White suspension rates appear to be as great or greater in more highly resourced suburban districts (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Wallace et al., 2008).

Finally, the percentage of African American students enrolled in a particular school has been shown to be a predictor of more punitive and exclusionary discipline. The statistical relationship between Black enrollment and increased punishment has been well documented (Rocha & Hawes, 2009; Welch & Payne, 2010). In particular, schools with higher proportions of African American students appear to use more punitive and fewer supportive interventions for school discipline. In a nationally representative sample, Welch and Payne (2010) found that schools with higher Black enrollments were more likely to have higher rates of exclusionary discipline, court action, and zero tolerance policies, even after controlling for school levels of misbehavior and delinquency.

Summary and Purpose

Together, these results suggest that both rates of and disparities in out-of-school suspension and expulsion are determined by a complex interaction of behavioral, student, and school characteristics. The advent of multi-level modeling approaches has allowed a more sophisticated exploration of this range of variables, simultaneously examining student and teacher (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) or student and school contributions (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). Yet there has not been to this point an investigation exploring characteristics of infractions, student demographics, and schools simultaneously. The purpose of this study was to use a hierarchical linear modeling approach to more precisely examine the contributions and interactions of behavior, student characteristics, and school-level variables to exclusionary discipline and racial disparities in discipline. In the context of an escalating national conversation that has begun to shift the focus to an exploration of alternatives to suspension and expulsion, the results of such an analysis may be highly important in determining where to put resources in school discipline reform efforts.

Methods

Data and Measures

Disciplinary Outcomes

School discipline records. The primary data source was an extant database containing records for all incidents of suspension and expulsion in
all public schools, including charter schools, in a Midwestern state, for the 2007–2008 school year. Since previous results for Latino students have been inconsistent, and there is a smaller Latino population in the state from which the data were drawn, we chose to focus only on the comparison of African American and White students in these analyses. The database included a total of 323,104 incidents of suspension and expulsion for 126,310 students in 1,720 schools. It is important to note that the sample represents not all students in the state, but rather those students who had received an in-school or out-of-school suspension or expulsion for some infraction. Student demographic information, including gender and race/ethnicity, was obtained from a second extant state database. School-level demographic data obtained from the state’s Department of Education were combined with school-level data on principal attitudes toward discipline generated from a survey conducted in 2008. The incident data were linked to the student data using the common student identifier present in both data sets; both of these sets of data were linked to the school database with the common school identifier present in all three data sets. In order to be included in the final data set, complete information at all three levels was required. The final data set used in the following analysis consisted of 730 schools, 43,320 students, and 104,445 incidents. All data collection procedures and analyses were submitted to and approved by the institutions’ Internal Review Board with respect to protection of human subjects.

Principal Perspectives on Discipline

Disciplinary Practices Survey (DPS). In order to assess principal perspectives on school discipline, we adapted the Disciplinary Practices Survey (Skiba, Edl, & Rausch, 2007), a survey instrument designed to provide data on a broad range of principal attitudes toward the process of school discipline. Items were generated based on a review of previous surveys of principals’ perceptions and practices related to school discipline: *National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools* (Gottfredson et al., 2000), *Discipline in Secondary Schools* (Green & Barnes, 1993), *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools* (Heaviside et al., 1998), *Suspension, a Wake-up Call* (Henderson & Friedland, 1996), and *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* (Kaufman et al., 2001). In the current version, items were added to the survey concerning views on race and culture and the total number of items was reduced.

The final Disciplinary Practices Survey was comprised of 42 questions organized into seven content areas: (a) attitude toward discipline in general, (b) awareness and enforcement of disciplinary procedures, (c) beliefs concerning suspension/expulsion and zero tolerance, (d) beliefs about responsibility for handling students misbehaviors, (e) attitude toward differential
discipline of disadvantaged students or students with disabilities, (f) resources available for discipline, and (g) attitude toward and availability of prevention strategies as an alternative to exclusion. Principals were asked to rate their agreement with statements reflecting various attitudes about the purpose, process, and outcomes of school discipline. Thirty-one of the questions assessed principal opinion about one of these aspects of discipline, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The other 11 items asked principals to estimate how frequently they used certain disciplinary or preventive strategies (peer mediation or in-school suspension) with response anchors ranging from 1 = never used to 5 = frequently used. Overall internal consistency reliability assessment of the scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .70.

Two forms of the survey were developed: an online survey and a hard copy mailed to those who did not participate online. As recommended by Weisberg, Kronsnick, and Bowen (1989), each recipient of the hard copy survey received $5 along with the survey as an incentive for completion, and e-mail participants received the same amount after submitting a completed survey. Of the 1,875 surveys sent out, a total of 1,068 (N = 1,068) were completed, yielding a response rate of 57%, above the 50% minimum recommended in the literature (Weisberg et al., 1989). Data from the DPS were linked to the other data sources using the common school identifier.

A cluster analysis of the results from the DPS was conducted using the KMEANS procedure in SPSS, placing individuals in clusters based on their proximity to the group centroid. The analysis yielded a two-cluster solution representing two different perspectives on school discipline. Responding principals fell into two groups: one group more favorable to a preventive orientation toward school discipline and another representing attitudes more favorable to the use of school exclusion and zero tolerance as a disciplinary strategy.

**Statistical Method**

**Multilevel Modeling**

A multilevel analysis was conducted in order to parse the influence of behavioral, student, and school characteristics on disparities in the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. In this analysis the disciplinary outcome (out-of-school suspension and expulsion) was modeled using a multinomial logit hierarchical linear regression model. A hierarchical model was used because it provides unbiased estimates of regression coefficients when observations are not independent. A student may receive multiple disciplinary outcomes, and multiple students from the same school (discipline system) may receive disciplinary outcomes. The use of hierarchical linear modeling is thus more appropriate than ordinary least squares or logistic regression, since observations (disciplinary outcomes) are not independent
but rather nested (Raudenbush & Byrk, 2002)—behavioral incidents are nested within students, who are in turn nested within schools. The presence of three possible disciplinary outcomes—in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion—led us to choose a multinomial logistic model. In multinomial models, a reference level for the dependent variable must be defined, and regression coefficients indicate changes in odds relative to this reference level. In order to characterize the outcome variable, increases in severity of disciplinary outcome, the reference level throughout all analyses was in-school suspension. Thus, the models assesses the severity of punishment at the office level; that is, the contribution of variables in the model to the odds that a student, having been referred to the office for discipline, will receive the consequence of out-of-school suspension or expulsion, in comparison to an in-school suspension.

**Description of Model Fitting**

The HLM software version 7.00 was used to fit Model 1 and Model 2 (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2004). For Model 1, the HLM2 procedure was used to fit a multinomial logit model, and for Model 2, the HLM3 procedure was used and the continuous covariates were centered using the grand mean. For both models, the penalized quasilikelihood method (PQL) was used to estimate the coefficients (Raudenbush et al., 2004).

**Specification of the Model**

A sequential logistic regression approach (Peng, So, Stage, & St. John, 2002) was used within the hierarchical linear model (HLM) analysis to model the contribution of predictor variables, representing type of infraction, student characteristics, and school characteristics, on the two levels of increased severity of the disciplinary outcome (out-of-school suspension and expulsion): Model 1 consisted of a block of infraction type and student-level variables, while Model 2 included these two levels of variables while adding a block of school-level variables. Sequential logistic modeling was also chosen because it provides one method for examination of the interaction effects of potentially confounded variables (Peng et al., 2002).

The three levels of variables included across Model 1 and Model 2 were as follows.

**Type of infraction.** Variables at this level included the type and frequency of infraction leading to each incident of suspension/expulsion. Seventeen original classifications present in the database were regrouped into four categories: Use/Possession (USE_POS) (alcohol, drugs, deadly weapons, handguns, rifles or shotguns, other firearms, tobacco), Fighting/Battery (FIGHT) (fighting, battery), Moderate Infractions (MODERAT) (intimidation, verbal aggression or profanity, destruction of property), and
Defiance/Disruption (defiance, attendance, other). The last variable represented the reference level for the analyses in this block of variables.

**Student characteristics.** Student-level variables included were gender (MALE), eligibility for free and reduced lunch (FRL), and race (BLACK). Each of these characteristics has two levels: The reference level for gender was female, for FRL the reference was paid lunch, and for race the reference level was White.

**School characteristics.** School-level variables included percentage of African American students enrolled in the school (PCTBLACK), average years of teacher experience at the school (TCHEXP), percentage of students in the school eligible for free or reduced lunch (PCTFRL), percentage of students passing math and English on the state accountability exam (PCTPASS), and principal perspective on school discipline (DPS). This last variable consisted of two categories (favorable toward prevention/favorable to use of exclusionary discipline) generated from the cluster analysis of the Disciplinary Practices Scale.

**Description of Models**

Models 1 and 2 consist of two linear equations at each level. One linear model characterizes the change in odds of out-of-school suspension relative to in-school suspension and the other the change in odds of expulsion relative to in-school suspension. Both Model 1 and Model 2 are the simplest versions of a hierarchical model, an intercept model. In the intercept model, the influence of different levels of characteristics on the change in odds is additive. A random coefficient was included in the student- and school-level equations to capture the dependence in observations clustered by student and school.

Model 1 consists of two sets of linear equations: a model of the influence of the characteristics of the behavioral incident and a model of the influence of student characteristics.

\[
\log[p_{2i}/p_{4i}] = \pi_{0(2)} + \pi_{1(2)} * (USE\_POS_{it}) + \pi_{2(2)} * (FIGHT\_it) + \pi_{3(2)} * (MODERAT\_it)
\]

\[
\log[p_{3i}/p_{4i}] = \pi_{0(3)} + \pi_{1(3)} * (USE\_POS_{it}) + \pi_{2(3)} * (FIGHT\_it) + \pi_{3(3)} * (MODERAT\_it)
\]

\[
\pi_{0(2)} = \beta_{00(2)} + \beta_{01(2)} * (MALE\_i) + \beta_{02(2)} * (FRL\_i) + \beta_{03(2)} * (BLACK\_i) + r_{0i(2)}
\]

\[
\pi_{0(3)} = \beta_{00(3)} + \beta_{01(3)} * (MALE\_i) + \beta_{02(3)} * (FRL\_i) + \beta_{03(3)} * (BLACK\_i) + r_{0i(3)}
\]
Model 2 consists of three sets of linear equations, the two levels modeled by Model 1 and a third set for the school-level characteristics:

\[
\log \left[ \frac{\phi_{2ij}}{\phi_{4ij}} \right] = \pi_{0ij(2)} + \pi_{2ij(2)} \ast (USE_{POS_{ij}}) + \pi_{3ij(2)} \ast (FIGHT_{ij}) + \pi_{4ij(2)} \ast (MODERAT_{ij})
\]

\[
\log \left[ \frac{\phi_{3ij}}{\phi_{4ij}} \right] = \pi_{0ij(3)} + \pi_{2ij(3)} \ast (USE_{POS_{ij}}) + \pi_{3ij(3)} \ast (FIGHT_{ij}) + \pi_{4ij(3)} \ast (MODERAT_{ij})
\]

\[
\pi_{0ij(2)} = \beta_{00j(2)} + \beta_{01j(2)} \ast (MALE_{ij}) + \beta_{02j(2)} \ast (FRL_{ij}) + \beta_{03j(2)} \ast (BLACK_{ij}) + r_{0j(2)}
\]

\[
\pi_{0ij(3)} = \beta_{00j(3)} + \beta_{01j(3)} \ast (MALE_{ij}) + \beta_{02j(3)} \ast (FRL_{ij}) + \beta_{03j(3)} \ast (BLACK_{ij}) + r_{0j(3)}
\]

\[
\beta_{00j(2)} = \gamma_{000(2)} + \gamma_{001(2)} \ast (PCTBLACK_{j}) + \gamma_{002(2)} \ast (TCHEXP_{j}) + \gamma_{003(2)} \ast (PCTFRL_{j}) + \gamma_{004(2)} \ast (PCTPASS_{j}) + \gamma_{005(2)} \ast (DPS_{j}) + u_{00j(2)j}
\]

\[
\beta_{00j(3)} = \gamma_{000(3)} + \gamma_{001(3)} \ast (PCTBLACK_{j}) + \gamma_{002(3)} \ast (TCHEXP_{j}) + \gamma_{003(3)} \ast (PCTFRL_{j}) + \gamma_{004(3)} \ast (PCTPASS_{j}) + \gamma_{005(3)} \ast (DPS_{j}) + u_{00j(3)j}
\]

Results

Descriptive Data

Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide descriptions respectively of the 104,445 incidents, 43,320 students, and 730 schools in the sample. Table 1 shows an overall increase in the severity of discipline administered with an increase in the severity of the offense. Defiance/disruption is the most frequently occurring, least serious type of infraction: The majority of students (60.3%) who participate in this type of infraction received in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension (OSS; 38.1%). While fighting/battery was a less frequently occurring infraction, the majority of students who participated in fighting/battery (71.6%) received out-of-school suspension, while only 1.7% were expelled for fighting or battery. The most serious infraction, use/possession, was also the least frequent and had the highest rate of expulsion (15.2%). The student characteristics for this sample (Table 2) indicate some disproportionality for students included in the suspension and expulsion report versus the state student population on all three demographic characteristics included at this level: Males represent 68.8% of the
population of students subjected to in- or out-of-school suspension or expulsion in this state sample, as opposed to the state population (51.3% male). There was also overrepresentation by FRL status (53.4% of the current sample, 37.5% in the overall state population state population) and race (23.7% Black among those suspended or expelled, 12% in the overall state enrollment). Table 3 presents the mean of variables included in the block of school characteristics in Model 2. For the two clusters representing principal perspectives on the Disciplinary Practices Scale, a larger percentage of principals evidenced scores that led them to be included in the cluster favorable to exclusion than the favorable to prevention cluster.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Data Used in Hierarchical Linear Model Analyses: Level 1 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of infraction</th>
<th>In-School Suspension</th>
<th>Out-of-School Suspension</th>
<th>Expulsion</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use/possession</td>
<td>692 (16.8)</td>
<td>2,795 (68.0)</td>
<td>626 (15.2)</td>
<td>4,113 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting/battery</td>
<td>3,630 (26.7)</td>
<td>9,727 (71.6)</td>
<td>227 (1.7)</td>
<td>13,584 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>4,513 (41.8)</td>
<td>6,138 (56.8)</td>
<td>155 (1.4)</td>
<td>10,806 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance/disruption/other</td>
<td>45,757 (60.3)</td>
<td>28,951 (38.1)</td>
<td>1,234 (1.6)</td>
<td>75,942 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54,592 (52.3)</td>
<td>47,611 (45.6)</td>
<td>2,242 (2.1)</td>
<td>104,445 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Data Used in Hierarchical Linear Model Analyses: Level 2 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2: Student</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29,712</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13,608</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>23,125</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>20,195</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10,251</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>33,069</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary Tests of the Model

A preliminary analysis was conducted in order to determine if bivariate associations between school- and student-level characteristics could impact the interpretation of estimates obtained from fitting Model 1 and Model 2 (Raudenbush et al., 2004). There was a moderate correlation in this data set between percentage Black enrollment and percentage free or reduced lunch \((r = .53)\) and between percentage Black enrollment and percentage passing math and English \((r = -.47)\). At the student level, race was associated with free or reduced lunch status, with Black students being more likely to be eligible for FRL \((\Phi_c = .248)\). A series of multinomial logit regression models were fit and no evidence of an influence of these bivariate associations on estimates of the influence of student or school characteristics was found. This finding is consistent with previous research that found an independent influence of SES and race on disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2002).

Results of HLM for Models 1 and 2

The estimates obtained from fitting Model 1 and Model 2 using the HLM software are presented in Table 4. In both models, random effects (variance components) were significant, indicating that the dependence between observations due to clustering by student (Model 1) and school (Model 2) was greater than 0. Results are described sequentially across each model: Behavioral incident and student characteristics variables in Model 1 are described prior to the entry of school characteristics in Model 2. After describing the contributions of school characteristics introduced in Model 2, changes in the odds of behavioral incident and student characteristic variables are described in the final section.\(^2\)
Table 4
Hierarchical Linear Model Multinomial Logit Regressions on Discipline Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1: behavioral characteristics</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-School Suspension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use/possession</td>
<td>7.454</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting/battery</td>
<td>4.944</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate infractions</td>
<td>2.455</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: student characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.204</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>1.051</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noneb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.248</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: school characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Black in enrollment</td>
<td>5.975</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of teacher experience</td>
<td>0.991</td>
<td>1.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage passing math and English</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable to school exclusionb</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable to preventionb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Effect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Component</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 effect</td>
<td>1.123</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 effect</td>
<td>4.629</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aReference category is in-school suspension for outcome.
bSince these are the reference categories against which the category of interest is compared, there is no odds ratio reported.
*p < .10.  **p < .05.  ***p < .01.
Type of Infraction

As compared to defiance/disruption, more serious categories of infractions—use/possession, fighting/battery, and moderate infractions—increased the odds of receiving more severe levels of suspension and expulsion, indicating that the severity of the consequence increased with the seriousness of the offense and that this general tendency is independent of student characteristics (Model 1). As in previous research (see e.g., Skiba et al., 2011), the least common infraction, use/possession, showed the greatest increase in the odds of out-of-school suspension (OSS) relative to in-school suspension (OR = 7.454) and expulsion (OR = 37.246).

Student characteristics. In Model 1, race showed the largest increases in odds of OSS relative to in-school suspension, with Black students being more likely to receive OSS (OR = 1.248) than White students. Males were more likely to receive OSS (OR = 1.204) than females. In Model 1, including only behavioral and student characteristics, students eligible for FRL were significantly more likely to receive OSS (OR = 1.051), but significantly less likely to incur expulsion (OR = 0.830) relative to in-school suspension.

School Characteristics

In the sequential multinomial logistic regression used in this study, school characteristics were entered along with behavioral and student characteristics in Model 2. The single strongest predictor among school characteristics was the influence of percentage of Black enrollment on OSS: The greater the proportion of Black students in a school, the more likely a student was to receive OSS (OR = 5.975) relative to in-school suspension. Indeed, percentage of Black enrollment at a school was among the strongest predictor of OSS across all levels; the size of the contribution of Black enrollment was only slightly less than the contribution of fighting/battery to the odds of receiving OSS. As was the case with FRL at the student level, poverty proved an inconsistent predictor of school discipline; percentage of students at the school receiving free or reduced lunch was not significantly related to OSS, but the odds of an expulsion were higher at a school with a lower school rate of FRL. As school-level achievement increased, both OSS (OR = 0.076) and expulsions (OR = 0.000) were less likely relative to in-school suspension. Finally, principal perspective on discipline was predictive of disciplinary practices concerning the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. In schools in which principals expressed attitudes more favorable toward school exclusion, students were significantly more likely to receive out-of-school suspension (OR = 1.376) and expulsion (OR = 2.320) relative to in-school suspension.
Sequential Effects

Sequential effects—the influence of variables added later in the model on the contribution of variables already included in the model—were examined in order to assess interactions among the variables (Peng et al., 2002). The influence of school-level characteristics on the contribution of student-level characteristics is apparent in changes to student-level coefficients from Model 1 to Model 2. When school characteristics were added in Model 2, students eligible for FRL were more likely to receive both OSS (OR = 1.189) and expulsion (OR = 1.175). Among the most notable findings of the analysis was the impact on the contribution of student race to discipline when school-level characteristics were introduced. Black students were significantly more likely to receive an out-of-school versus an in-school suspension in Model 1 but not in Model 2. This finding suggests that racial disparities in the use of out-of-school suspension may be explainable by a range of school-level variables, including principal perspective on discipline. The pattern of odds was reversed for expulsion.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to use a multilevel modeling approach to provide estimates of the relative contributions of behavioral, individual, and school-level characteristics to the odds of receiving more severe exclusionary consequences when disciplined: Our operating hypothesis was that the use of the more severe disciplinary consequences of out-of-school suspension and expulsion would be a complex function of variables at all three levels. For school discipline in general, this hypothesis was upheld, as type of infraction, student characteristics (e.g., race, gender, and SES), and school characteristics (e.g., Black enrollment rate and principal perspective), all made significant contributions to the likelihood of being suspended. Yet the analyses also suggested a somewhat different picture regarding racial disparities in discipline. While neither behavioral nor other individual characteristics fully accounted for the contribution of race to out-of-school suspension, school-level characteristics did reduce that relationship to nonsignificance. For racial disparities in suspension and expulsion, school-level characteristics appear to be more important predictors than behavioral or individual characteristics.

Type of Infraction

The relative strength of a range of infractions supports previous findings that the most reliable predictors of more serious outcomes in school discipline are more serious, less frequently occurring infractions. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Skiba et al., 2011), the least severe behaviors of defiance and disruption resulted in the least serious outcomes, whereas
behaviors such as use and possession resulted in the most severe outcomes. There was a proportional and consistent increase in the likelihood of more severe consequences according to the severity of behavior; this relationship was even stronger for expulsion, where the use or possession of drugs or weapons led to dramatically increased odds of removal, perhaps because expulsion is mandatory in the case of firearms under the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994). Yet while these relationships are predictive of overall likelihood of discipline, they may not necessarily predict racial disparities in discipline as well. Race remained a significant predictor of out-of-school suspension regardless of the severity of behavior. In a national study of schools implementing PBIS, Skiba et al. (2011) reported that while the assumptions of graduated discipline—that consequences are scaled in proportion to the severity of behavior—held in general across a national sample of elementary and middle schools, African American and Latino students were far more likely to receive exclusionary discipline consequences for mild and moderate offenses.

Student Characteristics

These results replicate and extend previous findings concerning the importance of individual demographic characteristics—in particular race and gender—in predicting disciplinary outcomes. Previous studies indicate that African American students are overrepresented in a range of disciplinary outcomes including classroom referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010), out-of-school suspension (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008), and zero tolerance–related expulsions (Tailor & Detch, 1998). In the current study, race proved a significant predictor of more severe disciplinary outcomes, even when holding a variety of other behavioral and demographic variables constant. Gender was also a significant predictor in the present study of increased likelihood of out-of-school suspension but not expulsion. Previous research suggests that males receive disciplinary action at disproportionate rates compared to females (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 1997, 2002). In the current study, SES proved inconsistent in its effects, predicting out-of-school suspension positively, but changing in contribution and even sign across different models in predicting expulsion (see the following for fuller discussion of the role of poverty in contributing to disciplinary disparity).

School Characteristics

A number of school characteristics, including self-reported principal orientation toward school discipline, were found to be significant in predicting the probability of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Consistent with previous findings (Advancement Project, 2000; Mukuria, 2002; Skiba, Edl, & Rausch, 2007), out-of-school suspension and expulsion were significantly
less likely in schools with a principal with a perspective favoring preventive alternatives to suspension and expulsion. The importance of principal leadership in creating systemic change appears to be especially critical when the focus of the change effort is race, culture, or equity. Young, Madsen, and Young (2010) reported that a number of the principals they interviewed failed to view equity initiatives as a priority and perceived themselves as lacking the knowledge, skills, or abilities to effectively address issues of inequity and cultural difference. In contrast, Theoharris and Haddix (2011) found that principals who raised achievement for marginalized groups addressed issues of race and inequity creatively and forcefully. Findings on the importance of principal perspective on school disciplinary outcome suggest the need for increased support and training for school administrators, such as the recent initiative by the AASA to support school superintendents in systemic reform around issues of school discipline (AASA, 2013).

As expected, achievement proved a protective factor for more severe consequences: Students at schools with higher average achievement were significantly less likely to be suspended and highly less likely to experience expulsion. These results suggest that just as higher academic achievement is a protective factor for individuals, a school’s ability to maintain high overall achievement is a protective factor for students attending that school. Student behavior and academic outcomes have consistently been found to be strongly related: Gregory et al. (2010) term the achievement gap and discipline gap *two sides of the same coin*. Thus, interventions that improve the quality of academic instruction and learning outcomes can have important outcomes in terms of improved student behavior and school climate (Scott, Nelson, & Liaupsin, 2001); at the same time, consistent findings of a negative relationship between school achievement and rates of exclusionary discipline (see also Davis & Jordan, 1994; Rausch & Skiba, 2005) suggest that schools that focus on the proactive development of a supportive school climate are likely to see academic benefits as well.

The effects of economic disadvantage are widely assumed to be a key predictor of rates of discipline and disproportionality, both in the literature (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998) and in the national dialogue (Chavez, 2014). Yet, these data join other research in suggesting that the effect of socioeconomic status may be less pronounced than commonly believed. In contrast to the inconsistent effects of individual poverty on the likelihood of suspension, when all three levels were included in the model, higher school rates of eligibility for free and reduced lunch at a school were not significantly related to the probability of out-of-school suspension, and higher school FRL rate predicted lower rates of expulsion. These patterns accord with previous findings regarding the inconsistency of the contribution of poverty to student behavior and disproportionality. Indicators of poverty have been found to be predictors of school discipline and school suspension (Nichols, 2004; Petras et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). Yet
the association between individual and family poverty and student behavior has been found to be weak at best (Duncan et al., 1994; Letourneau, Duffett-Leger, Levac, Watson, & Young-Morris, 2011). Contrary to expectation, the contributions of indicators of poverty to racial disparities in discipline have been found to be nonsignificant, or insufficient to explain disproportionality in discipline (Wallace et al., 2008).

The most striking of the school-level results was the consistency with recent studies (e.g., Rocha & Hawes, 2009; Welch & Payne, 2010) in finding that school percentage of Black enrollment is a strong and robust predictor of school suspension. In this study, attending a school with a higher percentage of Black students was among the strongest predictors of OSS, behind only weapons possession and fighting/battery in importance. It is somewhat striking that attending a school with more Black students increases one’s risk of out-of-school suspension nearly as much as engaging in a fight or battery. It is even more startling to realize that this relationship holds even after controlling for student demographics or behavior. This is not simply a matter of higher rates of suspension in poor urban schools with higher concentrations of African American students. Simultaneous entry of a number of individual and school characteristics in the multivariate model means that in rich and poor schools alike, regardless of one’s gender, one’s school achievement level, or the severity of one’s behavior, simply attending a school with more Black students substantially increases one’s risk for receiving an out-of-school suspension.

As findings concerning the relationship between Black enrollment and use of more restrictive and punitive disciplinary measures continue to accumulate, even when controlling for other possible explanations, it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid consideration of racial stereotypes (e.g., Ferguson, 2001) or implicit bias (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012) as a contributor to disparities in discipline. Research continues to show that racial stereotypes and implicit bias remain widespread in society in general (Cunningham, Nezlek, & Banaji, 2004) and in schools in particular (Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2008). The assumption that Black students from more disadvantaged backgrounds are at greater behavioral risk and will hence require tighter controls and supervision may lead to an a priori inclination to impose more restrictive and punitive measures as Black enrollment increases, regardless of the actual individual or behavioral characteristics of the school’s Black students. The possible influence of implicit bias in school discipline, currently under-researched and under-theorized, is thus a key area for future research. In particular, promising early results suggest that it may be possible to identify and remediate sources of implicit bias: In a study conducted within a college course, Devine et al. (2012) reported that a 12-week instructional intervention that taught participants strategies for prejudice reduction resulted in a significant reduction among participants in implicit bias.
Findings from this study are consistent with numerous previous investigations in identifying race to be among the strongest predictors of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. One of the key advantages to any multivariate approach is the ability to draw conclusions about a variable’s unique variance, and the changes in that variance, as other variables are entered into the equation. Thus, the continuing significance of race in Model 1 in predicting higher levels of out-of-school suspension cannot be explained by the severity of infraction or student characteristics—it is rather the unique contribution of race in and of itself. When, however, school characteristics, including percentage of Black enrollment and principal attitudes toward school discipline, are entered in Model 2, race becomes nonsignificant in predicting OSS. In general, these analyses supported the general hypothesis that OSS and expulsion are determined by a complex combination of type of infraction, student demographics, and school-level variables. When it comes to the contribution of race to out-of-school suspension, however, these results indicate that systemic school-level variables may be more important in determining the overrepresentation of Black students in discipline than are any behavioral or student characteristics. Together with results indicating a weak or counterintuitive contribution of individual or school rates of poverty to disciplinary disparity, these results suggest that policy or practice interventions addressing disproportionality in discipline will be more likely to be efficacious to the extent that they target alterable variables at the school level, rather than focusing on student or family demography.

Relationships between race, type of infraction, and odds of being disciplined appear to be somewhat different, and certainly more complex, in predicting expulsion. In Model 1, without considering systemic variables, race is not a significant factor in determining who will be expelled. Similarly, the percentage of Black students in the school, a highly significant predictor for out-of-school suspension, failed to enter the equation for expulsion. Garibaldi, Blanchard, and Brooks (1996) have argued that inadequate definition in the school discipline process allows greater room for individual bias to emerge. This observation is buttressed by consistent findings that disparities in out-of-school suspension are greatest in those behavioral categories (e.g., defiance, disrespect) that allow more room for subjective definition (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002). In the current data set, as in previous research, out-of-school suspension was applied for a wide variety of offenses, including infractions that are likely more subjective and less well defined. It may be that the more objective nature of more serious offenses such as carrying weapons, as well as state and federal requirements for expulsion for certain offenses, may reduce the opportunity for subjective judgments regarding expulsion, thereby decreasing the opportunity for decisions to be influenced by non-behavioral characteristics. Yet, the race of the individual student reemerges as a significant factor in...
Determining the odds of expulsion once systemic factors are reintroduced into the equation in Model 3. These results are consistent with previous findings suggesting that racial disproportionality remains a problem for zero tolerance policies, despite arguments that zero tolerance will reduce disparities through increased consistency in enforcement (see e.g., Tailor & Detch, 1998). Thus, although out-of-school suspension and expulsion are often linked together in investigations of racial disparity in exclusionary discipline, differences in both governing policies and the way in which the two measures are used in practice suggest that it may be more fruitful to examine racial disparities in out-of-school suspension and expulsion independently. A particular focus for policy and practice may be the contribution of ill-defined infraction categories to disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes; the Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, recently removed the subjective category willful defiance from the list of suspendable offenses in that district (Jones, 2013).

Limitations

It is important to note that these analyses refer to only one portion of the disciplinary decision-making process. Drawn from an extant database containing all incidents of in- and out-of-school suspension and expulsion for an entire state, the results are limited to administrative decisions. Previous research (Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011) has indicated that racial disparities in suspension and expulsion begin at the classroom level with office disciplinary referral. These data thus allow no statements about all the sources of variance that may enter into the disciplinary process prior to the administrative disposition. In addition, the use of an extant statewide disciplinary database, without more local measures such as student perceptions of school climate and the degree to which supports are available to teachers, does not offer an opportunity to understand micro-level processes in classrooms and schools that clearly shape disciplinary decisions and outcomes on a day-to-day basis. Clearly, more on-the-ground analyses, potentially involving a mixed-methods approach, are critical in gaining a richer understanding of why and how the variables that emerged in this analysis create and maintain inequity in school discipline.

The use of extant disciplinary data creates measurement questions, due to the numerous sources of variance that each disciplinary incident represents (Morrison, Peterson, O’Farrell, & Redding, 2004). Specifically, the end result—the decision to suspend or expel a student—is influenced at various points by variations in instructional effectiveness (Scott, Nelson, & Liaupsin, 2001), teachers’ classroom management abilities (Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002), and tolerance levels for student activity and learning styles (Gerber, 1988; Wright & Dusek, 1998), all of which affect teachers’ rates of office referral. Again, it must be made clear that these data speak only to the seriousness of the consequence.
applied to students who have reached the point of suspension or expulsion. Further analyses exploring the entirety of the disciplinary process, including infractions, teacher tolerance and classroom management, principal perspectives, and school and district policy, will be invaluable in gaining a richer understanding of school discipline outcomes.

Conclusions

The range of short- and long-term negative outcomes documented for exclusionary discipline has motivated an increasingly visible national dialogue (Fabelo et al., 2011; USDOE/DOJ, 2014) on the use of such strategies. In that context, a multilevel exploration of the factors contributing to the likelihood of out-of-school suspension and expulsion are important in providing a guide to the most promising avenues for policy and practice interventions. In undertaking this research, our working hypothesis was that decisions to apply out-of-school suspension or expulsion are determined by a complex interaction of infraction, student, and school-level variables. With respect to the overall probability of OSS and expulsion, that hypothesis was supported: Severity of infraction; race, gender, and to a certain extent SES at the individual level; percentage Black enrollment; school achievement level; and principal perspectives on discipline all made a contribution to the probability of out-of-school suspension or expulsion. Equally important, these data continue to raise serious concerns about the extent to which race predicts exclusionary discipline, and especially the factors that contribute to that disproportionality. Racial disparities in out-of-school suspension are ubiquitous and more likely to occur wherever there are more Black students, regardless of seriousness of infraction. The single most important finding from this analysis may well be that systemic, school-level variables appear to contribute to disproportionality in out-of-school suspension far more than either type of infraction or individual demographics. Such a finding strongly suggests that those wishing to have a positive effect on reducing or eliminating racial disparities in discipline would be well advised to seek interventions that focus on school policies and practices—principal leadership, achievement orientation, and the possible contributions of implicit bias—rather than on the characteristics of students or their behaviors.

Notes

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the William T. Grant Foundation for this research through their Major Grants Program.

1 Of the 730 schools in the final sample, 399 were classified as elementary schools, 123 as middle schools, 125 as high schools, and 83 as other, such as less common grade configurations such as K–8 or 6–12.

2 Reference categories, against which the categories of the variables of interest are compared, are noted in Table 2. Note that for bicategory variables (e.g., Black/White), the odds ratio for the reference category is simply the inverse of the odds ratio presented.
Contributions to Suspension and Expulsion

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**Contributions to Suspension and Expulsion**


doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2009.00620.x


Skiba et al.


Manuscript received July 29, 2013
Final revision received February 24, 2014
Accepted June 2, 2014
Module 2: Racial Disparities in Discipline & the School-to-Prison Pipeline
More Than a Metaphor: The Contribution of Exclusionary Discipline to a School-to-Prison Pipeline

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The term and construct “school-to-prison” pipeline has been widely used by advocates, researchers, and policymakers to describe the relationship between school disciplinary practices and increased risk of juvenile justice contact. It has been unclear whether the construct is a useful heuristic or a descriptor of empirically validated relationships that establish school disciplinary practices as a risk factor for negative developmental outcomes, including juvenile justice involvement. In this article, we examine the literature surrounding one facet of the pipeline, school exclusion as a disciplinary option, and propose a model for tracing possible pathways of effect from school suspension and expulsion to the ultimate contact point of juvenile justice involvement. Available multivariate analyses suggest that regardless of demographic, achievement, or system status, out-of-school suspension and expulsion are in and of themselves risk factors for a range of negative developmental outcomes. Recommendations are offered to assist schools in replacing disciplinary exclusion with a range of alternatives whose goal is to preserve both school order and provide all students with educational opportunities.

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially with respect to school discipline, in the public schools and juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the probability of negative life outcomes, particularly through involvement in the juvenile justice system. The term has been used widely by advocates for change (Advancement Project et al., 2011; American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2008), researchers (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeire, & Valentine, 2009), and policymakers. On December 12, 2012, Senator Dick Durbin, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, convened the first ever Congressional hearing on the topic of the school-to-prison pipeline (St. George, 2012).

The construct of the school-to-prison pipeline has been a useful heuristic, focusing on the possible contribution of school discipline to juvenile justice outcomes. Yet the increasing currency of the term does not guarantee consistency of usage: It is not always clear that all those who use the term “school-to-prison” pipeline are describing the same processes. Indeed, critics have argued that the construct of the STPP has not been scientifically validated, but is rather simply a political movement (see, e.g., James, 2013; Resmovits, 2013). Given the different interpretations and
challenges to the validity of the term, it is important to examine the state of evidence with respect to the STPP. What is the extent of empirical support for links between school-based disciplinary procedures and negative school and life outcomes, including juvenile justice involvement?

The purpose of this article is to examine the strength of the data relative to the short- and long-term effects of exclusionary school discipline: out-of-school suspension and expulsion.1 We began by identifying the components that have been acknowledged as characterizing the school-to-prison pipeline, in order to examine the empirical support for commonly identified attributes of the pipeline construct. We then conducted an extensive review of empirical research on discipline disparities and their association with a variety of short- and long-term outcomes in order to assess claims made about the school-to-prison pipeline in four areas.

First, the article continues with a review of exclusionary discipline practices as increasing in the nation’s schools. Second, we review the extent to which some groups are at increased risk for those practices. Third, we propose a model identifying the most salient benchmarks through which a connection between school disciplinary events (i.e., suspension or expulsion) and juvenile justice outcomes are most likely mediated or connected in a STPP and examine the literature supporting each of these links. Better articulation of the pathways in that model enables us to examine how schools’ disciplinary practices may increase the probability of placing students, especially students of color, on pathways that negatively impact their future educational opportunities and life outcomes. Finally, the article concludes with a consideration of the claims about directionality from school disciplinary actions to negative developmental outcomes (e.g., dropout or juvenile justice involvement), and a discussion of whether or not these claims can be justified given the strength of the empirical literature. We then propose a set of recommendations for beginning to shift towards more effective and equitable practices. Ultimately, examination of the above mentioned four sources of evidence leads to the conclusion that there is strong empirical support for links between school-based disciplinary procedures and negative school and life outcomes, including juvenile justice involvement.

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE?: THEMES IN THE STPP LITERATURE

As noted, school-to-prison pipeline (STPP), as a term, has been used in a variety of contexts. In order to capture a range of definitions of the term, we conducted a search for and collected research, policy, or advocacy reports specifically addressing “the school-to-prison pipeline.” That search included computerized bibliographic searches of both peer-reviewed and web-based reports in the areas of social science, education, and public affairs; personal inquiries to researchers known for their engagement with the topic so as to obtain their work and references to the work of others; and the tracking down (in snowball fashion) of bibliographic references appearing in materials as they were gathered.

Table 1 presents a representative sample of the use of the term drawn from published research, advocacy, and policy reports. A review of those definitions reveals at least four common themes. First, school exclusion through out-of-school suspension and expulsion as a form of school discipline has become widespread (ACLU, 2011; Burris, 2012), systematic (Kim, 2003), and increasing in usage (Heitzeg, 2009; Wald & Losen, 2003). Second, the use of exclusionary school discipline increases the probability for long-term negative outcomes, in particular juvenile
The school to prison pipeline refers to this growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via “zero tolerance” policies, and, directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Heitzeg, 2009, p. 1

“School-to-Prison Pipeline”—the use of educational policies and practices that have the effect of pushing students, especially students of color and students with disabilities, out of schools and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Advancement Project et al., 2011, p. 2

The School to Prison Pipeline proposes that exclusionary discipline techniques (e.g., detention, out of school suspension, disciplinary alternative education placements) experienced by African American males alienate them from the learning process by steering them from the classroom and academic attainment and toward the criminal justice system. Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010, p. 197

The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. ACLU, 2008

The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to policies and practices that systemically push at-risk youth out of mainstream public schools and into the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Kim, 2003, p. 956

These phrases refer to a journey through school that is increasingly punitive and isolating for its travelers—many of whom will be placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, held back in grade, and banished to alternative, “outplacements” before finally dropping or getting “pushed out” of school altogether. Wald & Losen, 2003, p. 3

The “School-to-Prison Pipeline” (STPP) refers to the framework of the United States school system that, by design, pushes students out of public schools through suspension or expulsion and into a juvenile detention facility or prison. Burris, 2012, p. 2

justice involvement (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). Third, these practices and outcomes fall disproportionately on specific populations (Wald & Losen, 2003), in particular students of color. Finally, the use of the term “school-to-prison pipeline” implies that there is a direction of causality—that policies and practices of schools, rather than solely the characteristics of students themselves, are responsible to some degree for those negative outcomes (Advancement Project et al., 2011; ACLU, 2011). Some have described the contribution of school disciplinary systems in stronger terms, including “pushout” (Kim, 2003) or “by design” (Burris, 2012).

In the remainder of the article, we examine the evidence base associated with each of the four basic themes identified in the literature to determine the extent of empirical support for the components of a school-to-prison pipeline. Our aim is to test in the existent empirical literature the extent to which the central assertions of a school-to-prison pipeline model are grounded in empirical findings, in order to gauge the empirical support for each of the four themes that run through previous definitions of the STPP. We address four research questions based on those themes:

1. Can the use of school exclusion be characterized as widespread, systematic, and increasing?
2. To what extent does the usage of school exclusion affect certain groups differently? Which groups appear to be most affected?
3. To what extent have links between school suspension/expulsion and further negative educational and life outcomes, including juvenile justice, been empirically demonstrated?
4. Is the literature strong enough to justify a claim of directionality or intentionality? Have available studies controlled for alternative hypotheses sufficiently to suggest that school practices themselves are a risk factor for future negative outcomes?

We examine each of these four questions in turn, beginning with an assessment of the status of school exclusionary discipline.

**Approach and Methodology**

The review examined these four research questions through a systematic search of research in peer-reviewed journals. Searches for peer-reviewed journal articles and dissertations were conducted using the online databases of ERIC, PsycInfo, Jstor, Academic Search Premier, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Psych Articles, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, and the Google Scholar search engine. All searches were limited to research connected to discipline in schools, published in English. Search terms included “school-to-prison pipeline,” “suspension,” “expulsion,” and “exclusionary discipline.” These were crossed with outcomes such as “academic engagement,” “school climate,” “achievement,” “dropout,” “graduation,” “juvenile justice,” and “arrests.”

Key inclusion criteria were that the articles or other documents were (a) based on empirical data specific to school discipline, (b) specifically disaggregated school discipline data to assess the differential impact of suspension or expulsion by group, and/or (c) focused on school discipline and short- or long-term outcomes such as academic engagement, achievement, climate, drop out, or juvenile justice involvement.

Key exclusion criteria were that the articles or other documents were not in English, not based on empirical findings, and not connected to K-12 education.

Results of the review are described in the following four sections, representing the four research questions of the study.

**HOW WIDESPREAD IS THE USE OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE? IS IT INCREASING?**

Research has documented that out-of-school suspension represents a central tool in the options available to schools for discipline, and although the use of school expulsion is much less frequent than the use of suspension, both procedures have increased substantially over time. Across a wide range of studies, suspension appears to be among the most commonly used response to disciplinary infractions (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). In a longitudinal investigation of suspension and expulsion for student cohorts, ranging from Grades 7 through 12, Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, and Booth, (2011) found that 59.6% of students in Texas public schools experienced at least one suspension or expulsion incident between seventh and twelfth grade. The use of both suspension and expulsion appears to be increasing substantially over time. Between 1974 and 2010, according to data collected by the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the rate at which students across the country were suspended and expelled
from schools almost doubled, from 3.7% (1.7 million students) suspended in 1974 (Wald & Losen, 2003) to 6.6% (over 3 million students) suspended in 2009–2010 (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

The use of out-of-school suspension is not restricted to serious, safety-threatening behaviors, but rather is distributed across a wide range of infractions. The majority of offenses for which students are suspended appear to be non-violent, minor to moderate infractions, such as disobedience and disrespect (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997), defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), attendance problems (Morgan-D’Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996), failing to report to detention (Rosen, 1997), and general classroom disruption (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999). Expulsion appears to be used more selectively, and more likely to be reserved for seriously disruptive, violent, or criminal behavior (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998).

DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS: WHO IS AT RISK FOR EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE?

Racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities have been found in national, state, and local level data, using a variety of measures, at all school levels and typologies (e.g., elementary vs. secondary; rural, suburban, and urban), and documented in both peer-reviewed journals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011) and advocacy reports (e.g., Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000; Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). African American disproportionality has been documented for office disciplinary referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Rocque, 2010; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011), suspension and expulsion (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), school arrests (Theriot, 2009), and corporal punishment (Shaw & Braden, 1990). Black students have been documented as receiving fewer mild disciplinary sanctions (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Payne & Welch, 2010) and more severe disciplinary consequences (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011) for similar infractions. Neither poverty status nor differential rates of disruptive behavior have been found to be sufficient as an explanation of African American disciplinary disparities (see, e.g., Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982).

Disciplinary disparities for other racial/ethnic categories have been less thoroughly studied, with less consistent results. While Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) found disparities in discipline for first- and third generation Latino students, others have reported rates of out-of-school suspension for Latino students not significantly different from white students (Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010; McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). In a national examination of self-reported data concerning discipline outcomes, Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) reported that Native American students were over-represented and Asian students under-represented in school discipline, in general, and suspension in particular. There is consistent evidence of disciplinary disproportionality among students with disabilities\(^2\) (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Raffaele Mendez, 2003). Analysis of the most recent CRDC data revealed that students with disabilities being served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are
more than twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspension as their peers without disabilities (US Department of Education, 2014).

Recent evidence shows that females of color also are disproportionally at risk for suspension and expulsion. Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) reported that African American girls were over five times more likely than white girls to be suspended or expelled. A number of studies have shown high rates of disciplinary disparities for black females at both the elementary and secondary school levels (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Daresbourg, 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons, in press).

Emerging research suggests that non-heterosexual youth also are disproportionately disciplined in school. Himmelstein and Bruckner (2011), using a nationally representative, population-based sample of adolescents in grades 7 through 12, found that non-heterosexual adolescents, particularly girls, were 1.25 to 3 times more likely to be punished at school than their heterosexual peers who engaged in the same level of misbehavior.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE PATHWAYS FROM SCHOOL PRACTICE TO NEGATIVE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES EMPIRICALLY SUPPORTED?

The school to prison pipeline predicts that school practices and policies that remove students from school for disciplinary reasons ultimately create increased risk for contact with the juvenile justice system. The model is represented in its simplest form in Figure 1. Although the data suggest that suspension and expulsion are long-term predictors of contact with juvenile justice (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Vanderhaar, Petrosko, & Munoz, in press), it seems unlikely that increased suspension and expulsion in and of themselves create a strong direct link to juvenile justice outcomes, since only a certain percentage of students who are suspended ultimately become involved with juvenile justice. Rather, the effects of

![Figure 1](image-url)
This more fully articulated model of a school-to-prison pipeline assumes that possible risks created by school exclusionary discipline are mediated or moderated by the effect of suspension and expulsion on a series of shorter-term outcomes that are presumably additive in increasing the ultimate risk of juvenile justice involvement. Exclusion are probably mediated by a number of short-term negative outcomes (see Figure 2) that are presumably increasing the risk of more severe outcomes, such as dropout and juvenile justice involvement. Although intended to improve the school climate by removing those students most likely to disrupt the educational environment, increased use of exclusionary discipline may be associated with more negative perceptions of the quality of the school climate (Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, in press). Given consistent findings linking opportunities to learn and achievement (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002), increased use of school exclusion through suspension and expulsion could reduce academic engagement, thereby negatively impacting student achievement. These outcomes could prove to be a potent predictor of both school dropout and eventual involvement in the juvenile justice system. We believe that this more articulated model of the benchmarks of an STPP enables a more detailed examination of the paths created by excessive use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion, and the extent of research support for each of those paths. In the succeeding sections, we take a closer look at each of these links, evaluating the extent and strength of the data documenting an association between exclusionary discipline and each of the benchmarks in a school-to-prison pipeline.

School Climate

School climate can be defined as the way in which members of a school community perceive different aspects of their school, including safety, emotional and socioeconomic well-being, and how these factors effect student learning (Nava Delgado, 2014). Student perceptions of a positive school climate are associated with improvements in academic achievement (see, e.g., Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003). Students who attend schools with climates rated more positively engage in fewer risk-taking and violent behaviors (Resnick et al., 1997), and have a lower probability of engaging in problem behavior (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010).
Research suggests that exclusionary discipline in schools is associated with more negative perceptions of school climate (see, e.g., Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, in press; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008), and that these perceptions of the quality of school climate vary by race. Examining relationships between suspension rates and school practices in 199 schools, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) found that the schools that students rated as having the lowest levels of support and academic expectations were associated with the highest rates of suspension as well as the largest black-white suspension gap. Black students hold more negative perceptions of school climate than their white peers, reporting more experiences of racism and lower ratings of racial fairness at school. These negative ratings have been associated with higher rates of detentions and suspensions (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Watkins & Aber, 2009).

School Engagement/Lost Educational Opportunity

Educational opportunity and engagement have consistently been found to be two of the strongest predictors of academic achievement (see, e.g., Brophy, 1988; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002), and the relationship between school alienation/school bonding and subsequent delinquency has been consistently documented (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Welsh, Greene, & Jenkins, 1999). In the long term, Toldson (2011) found school disengagement to be a strong predictor of truancy for African American males.

The evidence suggests that disciplinary removal has a negative effect on both educational opportunity and school engagement. Muscott, Mann, and LeBrun (2008) reported that an average office disciplinary referral (ODR) resulted in 15–45 minutes of lost time for students, teachers, and school administrators. In a study in one urban school district, 3,587 African American males missed a collective 3,714 school days in one academic year due to being suspended out-of-school (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). Such losses appear to predict a concomitant loss in school engagement and bonding. McNeely, Nonemaker, and Blum (2002) found school connectedness to be lower in schools that expel students for relatively minor infractions, while Davis and Jordan (1994) reported that the number of suspensions that African American males received was negatively related to school engagement among tenth-grade students. Higher rates of disciplinary referrals have been found to be associated with more negative attitudes and dispositions toward school (Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons, in press), and lower levels of school bonding (Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, & Abbott, 2001).

Achievement and Behavior

Although intended to improve behavior and achievement by removing disruptive students and deterring others from engaging in similar behavior, data suggest that school exclusion for disciplinary purposes is likely to be associated with negative academic and behavioral outcomes. Emerging evidence suggests a negative relationship between exclusionary school discipline and multiple measures of student academic achievement, including state accountability examinations (Rausch & Skiba, 2005), reading achievement (Arcia, 2006), school grades (Rocque, 2010), and writing achievement (Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). In a longitudinal investigation of
a matched sample of suspended and non-suspended middle school students, Arcia (2006) found a significant negative relationship between reading achievement growth and the number of days suspended over a three-year period. These relationships appear to be especially salient for students of color. In a multivariate model predicting achievement for African American males while controlling for a number of student demographic variables, Davis and Jordan (1994) found that a school’s emphasis on discipline and the number of suspensions a student received negatively predicted achievement in eighth grade.

Based on classical definitions of punishment (Alberto & Troutman, 2003; Skinner, 1953), one would expect suspension and expulsion to reduce future rates of disruptive behavior if they were effective. Rather than reducing the likelihood of being suspended, however, suspension appears to predict higher future rates of repeat offending that results in out-of-school suspension (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Raffaele Mendez (2003) found that the number of out-of-school suspensions a student receives in fourth or fifth grade was the strongest predictor of the number of suspensions later in middle school, even after statistically controlling for the student’s socioeconomic status, racial category, special education status, teacher ratings of student behavior, and academic achievement. This negative effect on behavioral trajectory has led some to conclude that, in many cases, “suspension functions as a reinforcer . . . rather than as a punisher” (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996, p. 91).

Dropout

Dropping out of school represents the culmination of a long process of disengagement with school, antisocial behavior, and low academic achievement and performance, and in turn greatly increases the risk of future negative outcomes. Students who drop out of school, will, over the course of their lifetimes, earn an average of $375,000 less than high school graduates and roughly $1 million less than college graduates (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). Dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than students who graduate from high school (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005).

There is extensive evidence that being suspended increases the probability of dropout or failure to graduate on time. In an eight-year longitudinal study, Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (in press) found that one suspension in ninth grade increased the risk of dropping out from 16% to 32%, while being suspended twice increased the risk of dropout to 42%. Suh and Suh (2007) reported that being suspended at least once increased the likelihood of dropping out of school by nearly 77.5%, and that suspensions are a stronger predictor of dropout than either grade point average (GPA) or socioeconomic status (SES). Suspension rates also are associated with higher dropout rates at the school level (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). Again, this relationship between school exclusion and dropout appears to be stronger for students of color. Raffaele Mendez (2003) reported that the number of out-of-school suspensions a student received as a sixth-grade student predicted a lower probability of on-time graduation; this relationship was stronger for African American students than white students.

Juvenile Justice Involvement

A strong link has been established in retrospective studies (e.g., youth already incarcerated) between suspension/expulsion and involvement in the criminal justice system. Sixty-one percent
of youth found in juvenile justice detention facilities reported being expelled or suspended from
school the year prior to entering juvenile justice custody (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). Krezmien,
Leone, and Achilles (2006) found that, in a sample of over 500 males in a juvenile correctional
facility, more than four in five had been suspended from school and more than one in two had
been expelled from school. The retrospective nature of such studies, however, does not enable
strong statements about the extent to which school exclusion may be a predictive risk factor for
juvenile justice involvement.

Stronger conceptual links between school exclusionary practices and juvenile justice contact
have been demonstrated by prospective longitudinal studies, tracking students through school
from disciplinary encounters to juvenile justice contact. Tracking cohorts of students in the
state of Texas from seventh through twelfth grade, Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael,
Marchbanks, and Booth (2011) found that suspension and expulsion for a discretionary school
violation nearly tripled a student’s likelihood of juvenile justice contact within the subsequent
year. Examining ten years of data on a cohort of students entering third grade, Vanderhaar,
Petrosko, and Munoz (in press) found that students who received one to two suspensions were
8 times more likely to be placed in an alternative school, and those with three or more suspensions
were 25 times more likely to be placed in an alternative school.

As in other relationships between exclusionary discipline and negative outcomes, relationships
between school exclusion and juvenile justice involvement appear to be stronger for African Amer-
ican students. Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeire, and Valentine (2009) examined school discipline
and juvenile justice data for African American and white youth aged 10–17 in 53 counties in
Missouri, and found racial disproportionality in out-of-school suspensions to be a strong predictor
of similar levels of racial disparity in juvenile court referrals, even when controlling for levels of
delinquent behavior, poverty, and other demographic variables. Vanderhaar, Petrosko, and Munoz
(in press) reported that of students placed in an alternative school for disciplinary reasons, 50%
of the black students placed in middle school were eventually detained, compared to 32% of the
white students.

IS THERE EVIDENCE OF CAUSALITY OR INTENTIONALITY
IN THE STPP?

The phrase “school-to-prison pipeline” implies directionality, a suggestion that school practices
associated with discipline initiate a process that places students at increased risk for a range of
negative developmental outcomes, including juvenile justice involvement. Since correlation does
not imply causation, but merely shows an association between school exclusion and negative
outcomes, it is not sufficient to prove that exclusionary discipline causes those outcomes. A
reasonable alternative hypothesis would be that poverty status would be causative of both higher
suspension rates and a higher likelihood of dropout, or that low achieving students are at increased
risk for a wide range of negative outcomes, including suspension and expulsion, academic
disengagement, dropout, and even incarceration (see, e.g., Harlow, 2003). Directionality also
might be reversed; that is, increased student misbehavior might force schools to use suspension
and expulsion on students who will eventually find themselves in an even more negative situation.
To what extent do the data support a claim of directionality, that school practices and expulsion
themselves create further risk for negative school and life outcomes?
More sophisticated research designs (e.g., multivariate designs that control for the covariance of multiple independent variables) ruling out alternate explanations or exploring longitudinal relationships are, in fact, quite common in the school discipline literature. Studies investigating disciplinary outcomes and disproportionality have controlled for socioeconomic status (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982), type of student behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011), or prior achievement levels (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). Explorations of the relationship between school suspension and school dropout (Suh & Suh, 2007) or juvenile justice involvement (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011) have typically been multivariate analyses. The logistic analyses in *Breaking Schools’ Rules* (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011) that formed the basis of the links between school discipline and school dropout and increased juvenile justice involvement included 83 control variables, including disability status, attendance rate, achievement rate, and economic disadvantage. Prospective longitudinal studies also have shown increases in risk over time due to suspension and expulsion for achievement (Arcia, 2006), further disciplinary involvement (Raffaele Mendez, 2003), dropout (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, in press), and delinquency/juvenile justice involvement (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Shollenberger, in press). Tracking suspended students over time, Shollenberger (in press) found that a significant proportion of suspended youth who later became delinquent had not engaged in serious delinquency until after their first suspension. Together, these more sophisticated analyses present a strong case that, above and beyond individual, family, and community risk factors, exclusionary school discipline makes a significant contribution in and of itself to a range of negative developmental outcomes.

Some definitions of the STPP move beyond claims of directionality to suggest that the movement of students out of school towards more restrictive alternatives is intentional or by design (Burris, 2012). There is only limited data in this regard. In a qualitative case study examining disciplinary procedures of a public inner-city high school, Bowditch (1993) reported that policies and procedures at that school encouraged disciplinarians to use suspensions, transfers, and involuntary “drops” to rid the school of students considered to be troublemakers. Figlio (2006), measuring a three-way interaction among high-stakes assessment, student achievement, and school exclusion in a subset of school districts in Florida, found that schools reduced their suspension penalties for higher-achieving students in high-stakes grades (grades four, five, eight, and ten) during the testing window, while simultaneously raising suspension penalties for lower achieving students in those same grades. Although such data provide some support for the notion that some schools use disciplinary exclusion to remove students whose scores might bring down school achievement means, there does not appear to be sufficient data to conclude that schools intend to accelerate the movement of some students, or some groups of students, towards the juvenile justice system.

**DISCUSSION**

The term school-to-prison pipeline has been used widely among advocates, researchers, and policymakers to describe a trajectory wherein out-of-school suspension and expulsion place students at risk for further negative outcomes, including involvement in the juvenile justice system.
The concept has been a useful metaphor for describing a variety of school-based procedures and creating a focus on links between school removal and short- and long-term outcomes. Yet some have claimed that there is no empirical validation of the school-to-prison pipeline, and that the use of the term serves political, more than scientific, ends (James, 2013). We attempted, therefore, to examine a range of literature to test the extent to which the central assertions of a school-to-prison pipeline model are grounded in empirical findings, and found substantial empirical support for each of the four themes that run through previous definitions of the STPP.

**School Exclusion is Widely Used and Increasing in Frequency**

There can be little doubt that out-of-school suspension and expulsion continue to be central components of discipline in our nation’s schools. The use of exclusionary alternatives in schools continues to increase, particularly for African American students. For out-of-school suspension, the use of the procedure is not restricted to serious or dangerous behavior, but rather appears to be most commonly used for more interactive day-to-day disruptions, especially defiance and non-compliance.

**School Exclusion Falls Disproportionally on Certain Groups**

The over-representation of African American students in discipline has been documented extensively for nearly 40 years, and continues to increase. Although more research is needed to better understand patterns of disproportionality for other racial/ethnic groups, especially Latino and Native American students, both gender and disability status have been found to be consistent predictors of disciplinary removal. Finally, emerging literature (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011) suggests that differences in sexual orientation or gender identity also may place students at risk for higher rates of discipline and exclusion.

**School Exclusion is, in and of itself, a Risk Factor for further Negative Outcomes**

While it is not unreasonable to suggest that, for some proportion of students, a first suspension or expulsion could lead to a delinquent event, the school-to-prison pipeline appears to be better described as a set of possible pathways. That is, out-of-school suspension and expulsion are associated with short-term negative outcomes, such as academic disengagement and depressed academic achievement that may cascade over time, ultimately increasing a student’s risk for contact with law enforcement and involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Review of the literature revealed a substantial body of research demonstrating an association between the experience of school exclusion and short- and long-term negative outcomes. Rates of school suspension and expulsion are associated with both qualitative (Sheets, 1996) and quantitative (Mattison & Aber, 2007) indicators of school climate. School exclusion also appears to increase short-term factors, such as loss of educational opportunity (Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008) and student engagement, that have been shown to increase the risk of negative academic and behavioral outcomes. It is not surprising then, that school exclusion through suspension
and expulsion is associated with decreases in academic achievement for both the overall school (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Rausch & Skiba, 2005) and individual levels (Rocque, 2010), and an increased risk of negative behavior over time (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Together, one would expect that disengagement and deteriorating academic and social outcomes would be mutually reinforcing, greatly increasing a student’s risk for failure to graduate or school dropout, and indeed the literature appears to provide substantial support for a link between school suspension and school dropout (e.g., Suh & Suh, 2007). The links between school disengagement, dropout, and juvenile justice involvement have been well-established (e.g., Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, & Abbott, 2001), so once again, findings of a link between school exclusion and juvenile justice (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeire, & Valentine, 2009) are not surprising.

Is there a Directionality or Intentionality to the STPP?

The term school-to-prison pipeline implies directionality—that events and actions taken at the school level in and of themselves increase the risk for future negative outcomes for students. Simple correlational or descriptive studies showing that students who are suspended are more likely to experience further negative outcomes are not sufficient to prove that school practices contribute to a causal sequence. At each point of association in our proposed STPP model, however, there are multivariate studies testing those relationships while controlling for a variety of demographic and behavioral characteristics; there are also longitudinal studies, which are more suited to testing direction of causation. Together, these studies make a solid case supporting the conclusions of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013) that suspension and expulsion are in and of themselves a developmental risk factor, above and beyond any behavioral or demographic risks students bring with them. Some writers (e.g., Burris, 2012) have suggested that the pipeline is not merely causal but intentional, but at this point, there is only limited evidence to support that suggestion.

CONCLUSION

Together, these findings provide substantial evidence that the school-to-prison pipeline is not simply a metaphorical or political concept. Rather, there is substantial research evidence supporting the claims most frequently made concerning the STPP. Although a commonly used procedure, removing a child or adolescent from school for disciplinary reasons through out-of-school suspension and expulsion increases the risk for a variety of serious negative outcomes. These risks are distributed unequally by race, gender, disability status and, most likely, by sexual orientation/gender identity as well. A highly consistent database suggests that the experience of out-of-school suspension or expulsion in and of itself increases student risk for school disengagement, poor school outcomes, dropout, and involvement with juvenile justice, especially among groups more likely to be disproportionately disciplined.

These serious and inequitable consequences have led to a national reconsideration of out-of-school suspension and expulsion as school disciplinary measures. A number of major urban school districts, including the Los Angeles Unified School District (Jones, 2013) and Broward
County, Florida (Alvarez, 2013), have revised their codes of conduct to emphasize preventive alternatives and use suspension and expulsion only as a last resort. As part of a national initiative to support school discipline reform, the US Departments of Justice and Education have issued new federal guidelines aimed at reducing the use of suspension and expulsion as well as the racial/ethnic disparities in rates of those measures, highlighting the discriminatory nature of disparities in school discipline (US Department of Education/Department of Justice, 2014).

Thus, a national consensus is developing around the need to replace procedures that appear to be both ineffective and inequitable, with a more preventive and instructional approach to developing safe and healthy school climates. Yet simply removing a tool that many schools may consider essential in maintaining school order will likely generate resistance and perhaps create a risk for increased school disorder, unless new approaches and resources are available to schools. Recently, the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative, a national consortium of researchers, educators, advocates and policy analysts, released a series of recommendations for reducing the use of exclusionary discipline, and especially for addressing disciplinary disparities, in the areas of school-based intervention (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014), policy (Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014), and research (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Some of those recommendations include:

### School-Based Intervention

- Develop intervention approaches that view issues of discipline as issues of equity, educational opportunity, and inextricable from issues of student instruction.
- Seek to prevent conflict by developing supportive student-teacher relationships, increasing academic rigor, improving the cultural responsiveness of instruction and classroom interaction, and establishing bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments.
- When conflict does occur, seek to utilize effective and pre-planned responses, such as structured inquiry into the causes of conflict through analysis of disaggregated discipline data, problem solving approaches to discipline, recognizing and including student and family voices, and reintegrating students after conflict.

### Policy

- Ensure that states and school districts annually collect, publicly report, and use disaggregated discipline data to guide disciplinary practices.
- Encourage the alignment of discipline policies with educational goals by revising federal and state accountability structures to include measures of discipline levels and disparities, requiring schools in turnaround status to address disciplinary as well as achievement gaps, and include incentives among federally supported programs for attention to reducing disciplinary gaps.
- Provide support for effective disciplinary alternatives by supporting increased research on the effects of those alternatives, especially on disciplinary disparities.
- Provide support for teacher training and professional development aimed at promoting higher levels of student engagement and improved student-teacher relationships.
Research

- Increase research on the extent of and reasons for disciplinary disparities, especially for groups that have been under-represented in that research, such as Native American, LGBT, and English language-learning students.
- Increase study on the impact of security personnel and technology on disciplinary outcomes, school arrests, and disparities.
- Build the knowledge base on effective interventions and programs that enable schools to reduce their use of exclusionary discipline and reduce disciplinary disparities.
- Increase study of the resources that schools and districts need in order to be able to create effective disciplinary reform.

For structural reform in school discipline to be successful, resources in the domains of practice, policy, and research will need to be mobilized in order to implement more effective and equitable methods of school discipline. In the face of an emerging consensus on reducing risk and disproportionality through more comprehensive and preventive approaches to building safe and effective school climates, the central challenge will be to ensure that schools have the tools they need to preserve both the effectiveness of the school learning climate, and student learning opportunity.

FUNDING

The authors gratefully acknowledge Atlantic Foundations and the Open Societies Foundation for their generous support of this research, and of the Discipline Disparities Collaborative in general. Special thanks go to Leigh Kupersmith for her assistance in formatting and design.

NOTES

1. Although definitions of the school-to-prison pipeline may include police presence or school arrests as components of that model (see, e.g., Price, 2009; Thurau & Wald, 2009/2010), due to space limitations, this paper will focus only on the extent to which exclusionary discipline practices contribute to a set of negative developmental outcomes that might be considered pathways in a school-to-prison pipeline model.
2. Students with disabilities are those served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2014).
3. The complete set of recommendations contained in those briefing papers, as well as supplementary materials pertaining to disciplinary disparities, can be found on the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative website: rtpcollaborative.indiana.edu

REFERENCES


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The persistent effect of race and the promise of alternatives to suspension in school discipline outcomes

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Article history:
Received 22 February 2014
Received in revised form 26 June 2014
Accepted 27 June 2014
Available online 10 July 2014

Abstract

Demographic and student discipline data were used to examine the influence of multi-level risk and protective factors on exclusionary school discipline outcomes. Participants included all youth (n = 87,997) in grades K to 12 who were enrolled in Denver Public Schools (n = 183) in 2011–2012. The dataset included measures of risk and protective factors for exclusionary school discipline outcomes such as race, family poverty, special education status, emotional disability, participation in gifted and talented programs, homelessness, office referral reasons over the course of one school year, participation in in-school suspension, a behavior contract, or restorative approaches, and school composition. Multilevel logistic regression modeling was used to estimate students’ likelihood of receiving one or more office disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and/or law enforcement referrals. Findings indicate that student racial background and school racial composition are enduring risks across key decision points of the school discipline process. Conversely, participation in restorative interventions and in-school suspensions protects students from out-of-school suspensions. This study suggests that ongoing attention to issues of racial inequity in school discipline outcomes is warranted, and that restorative practices have potential as an inclusive strategy to improve school discipline outcomes without excluding students from the classroom.

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1. Introduction

The use of exclusionary school discipline practices, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, is a growing concern among researchers and youth service providers. Studies indicate that young people who are disciplined in school are at greater risk than other students to experience a host of academic and psychosocial problems across the lifespan (Hemphill et al., 2012; Rausch, Skiba, & Simmons, 2004; Sprague & Hill, 2000). Youth who have been suspended or expelled are more likely than other youth to be held back a grade level, leave school, or become involved in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011; Rausch et al., 2004; Skiba et al., 2003). This negative trajectory, often referred to as the “school to prison pipeline” has increasingly been the target of youth and community organizing for educational justice (Ford et al., 2013; González, 2011).

Studies of school disciplinary practices also reveal troubling and persistent patterns of disparity. Low-income children, students with disabilities, and youth of color, particularly Black boys in special education, are significantly more likely than students of other backgrounds to be referred to school administrators for discipline problems and to receive out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or a referral to law enforcement as punishment (Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013; Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014; Krezmienn, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Theriot, Craun, & Dupper, 2010; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). These students tend to be disciplined more harshly for the same behaviors that are committed by more advantaged students and are less likely to have access to opportunities to develop social and emotional skills valued by schools (Reyes, Elias, Parker, & Rosenblatt, 2013).

A growing number of scholars, school-based mental health professionals, and educators have therefore suggested that the goal of achieving educational equity for vulnerable youth cannot be realized without eliminating disparities in school discipline practices (Beck & Muschkin,
Disparities in exclusionary discipline sanctions are the result of complex interactions between risk and protective factors at different points in the school discipline process. These points typically include office referral, suspension, law enforcement referral, and expulsion. Characteristics of students, families, teachers, administrators, classroom environments, school climates, neighborhoods, district policies, and historical context all affect the way in which young people are disciplined (Ferguson, 2001; Morris, 2005; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). However, findings from numerous studies indicate that racial disparities in discipline outcomes persist after accounting for student behavior and confounding variables like poverty, disability, previous academic achievement, school composition, district dynamics, and neighborhood context (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2008). To explain this inequality, investigators have identified differential patterns of institutional decision-making at two key points in the discipline process: 1) the differential selection of students of color for office disciplinary referrals; and 2) the differential processing of racial minority students for discipline resolutions, particularly exclusionary sanctions like out-of-school suspension, law enforcement referrals, and expulsion (Gregory et al., 2010).

1.1. Differential selection

School discipline processes generally begin with an office referral, most often made by a classroom teacher. Referrals tend to be driven by minor infractions and subjective categories of student misconduct, such as defiance and disrespectful behavior, rather than more objective and serious behaviors like bringing a weapon to school (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2002, 2011; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Teachers typically initiate discipline referrals in response to disruptive externalizing behaviors or challenges to their authority (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Nichols, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002). This general pattern may exacerbate the problem of racial disparities in school discipline outcomes given prior findings suggesting that school staff members’ perceptions of student behavior problems are often racially biased. Compared to White youth, school staff often perceive Black and Latino youth as aggressive, oppositional and threatening, whereas they expect Asian American youth to be anxious, perfectionistic and timid (Chang & Sue, 2003; Lau et al., 2004; Morris, 2005; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002). Such biases in perceptions of student behavior likely contribute to differential selection for office referrals and racial disproportionalities in the distribution of referral reasons.

1.1.2. Differential processing

Investigators have noted that administrative responses to discipline events are inconsistent and also prone to influence by racial stereotypes (Hannon et al., 2013; Morris, 2005; Shaw & Braden, 1990). Once an office disciplinary referral is made, administrators are largely responsible for decisions about the consequences for the misconduct reported in the referral. Decisions about serious and objective infractions, such as bringing a firearm to school, are often dictated by state, federal or district policy. However, consequences for more common forms of misconduct, such as disruptive behavior and defiance, are generally at the discretion of school district administrators and are rarely applied consistently, even for the same behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Nichols, 2004; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Skiba et al., 2011, 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Subjective discipline problems like these, in which students breach implicit norms among school staff, have the greatest potential for bias in processing, as administrators’ behavioral expectations – like those of teachers’ and students’ – are shaped by perception, culture, and context (Monroe, 2006).

1.2. Alternatives to suspension

Evidence suggests that proactive and preventive behavioral interventions reduce discipline incidents and protect students from suspension and expulsion (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2013; Monroe, 2006; Skiba et al., 2011). Skiba and colleagues found that Black students are less likely to experience an exclusionary discipline sanction in schools where the principal has a prevention orientation to student discipline and implements alternative consequences such as in-school suspension (Skiba et al., 2003). Indeed, a variety of high quality prevention programs that aim to increase students’ social and emotional learning skills have demonstrated reductions in student behavior problems and suspension rates (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Walker, Kerns, Lyon, Bruns, & Cosgrove, 2010; Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001). Emerging research suggests that restorative practices may be a particularly effective approach to preventing office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions (González, 2012; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative approaches that focus on repairing the harm caused by a discipline incident through classroom circles (group dialogues) and conferencing (mediation) with victims and offenders appear to be particularly promising.

1.3. The policy context in Denver, Colorado

Policies designed to improve discipline practices in Denver, Colorado offer a unique opportunity to examine the influence of alternatives to out-of-school suspension and the effect of race on exclusionary school discipline outcomes. Efforts to reform school discipline practices in Denver have come from several sources. In the past ten years, a community-based organization called Padres y Jovenes Unidos, in cooperation with the Advancement Project and the national Books Not Bars movement, has led a grassroots effort to end the school-to-jail pipeline in Colorado (González, 2011). In response to concerns voiced through this campaign by community members, parents, and students, Denver Public Schools (DPS) reformed its discipline policy in 2008. The reforms aimed to reduce the use of suspensions, law enforcement referrals, and expulsions in response to student misbehavior and to eliminate racial disparities in discipline practices. Rather than relying on exclusionary sanctions, the 2008 policy requires schools to implement restorative and therapeutic interventions as resolutions to student misconduct and to only refer students to law enforcement when legally mandated to do so. The policy also granted district administrators more influence over expulsion decisions and created a centralized discipline process with increased checks and balances. Since the introduction of these policy changes, the district has lowered suspension and expulsion rates by nearly 40%, with reductions benefitting students of all backgrounds, particularly at the secondary school levels (see Tables 1–2). These trends are impressive because they have taken place during a time when the overall district population has increased by 14%, making DPS the fastest growing urban school district in the nation (Department of Planning and Analysis, 2013).

Despite these successes, recent DPS data reveal that Black, Latino and Native American youth are still more likely than their White or Asian peers to experience an exclusionary discipline sanction. As shown in Table 2, though all racial sub-groups of students have experienced a reduction in suspension rates since the 2008 policy reform, discipline gaps have not decreased substantially over time. Thus, school district
officials and local stakeholders were eager to learn if these patterns can be explained by the higher prevalence of poverty and special education participation among students of color, and whether interventions supported by the new discipline policy, such as restorative approaches, are contributing to district-wide reductions in the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. To meet these needs and inform the knowledge base on school discipline more broadly, a researcher–practitioner partnership between DPS and investigators at the University of Denver (DU) was established in 2012.

1.4. Study aims and contributions

This study examines racial disparities and the protective influence of alternatives to suspension in discipline outcomes at each stage of the school discipline process. Analyses are derived from a rich and unique school district dataset that includes outcomes at four distinct decision-making points in the discipline process: 1) office referral; 2) suspension; 3) law enforcement referral; and 4) expulsion. In addition, the dataset includes student-level covariates that are rarely accounted for in studies of school discipline, though emerging evidence and theory indicate that these factors do influence school discipline outcomes (Fabelo et al., 2011). These covariates include students’ designation as seriously emotionally disabled, a native speaker of English, eligible for the gifted and talented program; 12% participated in special education and 1% had a speech disability (38%), other violations of the school’s code of conduct (25%), bullying (10%), and/or possession or distribution of drugs (7%). Among those students referred to the office, nearly 46% received one or more out of school suspensions (6% of all students in the district), 5% were referred to law enforcement, and 0.7% were expelled. With respect to alternatives to suspension, 37% of students referred to the office received one or more in-school suspensions, whereas 7% received one or more restorative interventions, and 4% were placed on behavior contracts.

1.5. Research questions

The following questions guided the investigation:

1. Does race independently contribute to students’ risk of office discipline referral, suspension, law enforcement referral, and/or expulsion?

2. Do alternative approaches to resolving discipline problems, such as behavior contracts, in-school suspension, and restorative approaches protect students from out-of-school suspension and expulsion?

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample and study site

The cross-sectional dataset used in this analysis included all students (n = 87,997) in grades K to 12 who were enrolled in DPS schools (n = 183) during one academic year (2011–2012). The sample was 58% Latino, 20% White, 15% Black, 3% Asian, 3% Multiracial and less than 1% Pacific Islander. Forty-nine percent of the student population was male and 51% was female. Fifty-eight percent of students were native speakers of English. The district serves predominantly low-income students; 67% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch and 2% of students were identified as homeless during the school year of interest. Thirteen percent of students participated in the gifted and talented program; 12% participated in special education and 1% had a serious emotional disturbance.

Twelve percent (n = 10,705) of all students in the district were referred to the office for discipline problems. A majority of these students (53%) were referred to the office more than once during the school year. The most common reasons for office referrals were detrimental behavior (53%), disobedience or defiance (38%), other violations of the school’s code of conduct (25%), bullying (10%), and/or possession or distribution of drugs (7%). Among those students referred to the office, nearly 46% received one or more out of school suspensions (6% of all students in the district), 5% were referred to law enforcement, and 0.7% were expelled. With respect to alternatives to suspension, 37% of students referred to the office received one or more in-school suspensions, whereas 7% received one or more restorative interventions, and 4% were placed on behavior contracts.

2.2. Variables

Demographic and discipline records were downloaded from the district’s student information system (Infinite Campus), and included variables that reflect state, federal, and local policy mandates for data collection by educational agencies. Student racial categories were: 1) American Indian or Alaska Native; 2) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; 3) Asian or Asian American; 4) Black or African American (non-Hispanic); 5) Hispanic or Latino/Latina; 6) White or Caucasian; and 7) Multiracial. Each racial category was recoded into
dummy variables. Additional student-level variables available in the dataset were all dichotomous and included gender (male or not), free and reduced lunch eligibility (eligible or not), special education status (active Individualized Education Program or not), designation as seriously emotionally disabled (disability coded as emotionally disabled or not), identification as homeless (homeless or not), participation in the gifted and talented program (participant or not), and native language (native speaker of English or not).

Other student-level covariates included dichotomous variables that indicated whether or not a student was referred to the office over the course of a school year for each possible referral category, as defined in the district’s discipline policy (González, 2011). These categories (in order of overall severity) include destruction of school property, disobedience or defiance, bullying, detrimental behavior, other violations of the school’s code of conduct, third degree assault, first degree assault, drug possession or distribution, and possession of a dangerous weapon. Likewise, data assessing students’ participation in an alternative intervention to suspension were dichotomous. These variables indicated whether a student had received one or more of the following interventions over the course of a school year: in-school suspension, restorative approaches, or placement on a behavior contract. Student-level dependent variables for each statistical model were dichotomous. These variables indicated the receipt of one or more exclusionary discipline sanctions over the course of a school year: office disciplinary referral, out-of-school suspension, referral to law enforcement, and/or expulsion.

School-level covariates included the proportion of the student body that is Black or Latino and grade configuration (traditional middle school with 6–8th graders, or not). Other investigators have noted that middle schools and highly segregated schools tend to use punitive discipline sanctions more widely, a practice that is associated with racial disparities in suspension and expulsion (Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2013). However, a school’s racial composition is not always associated with an increased risk for disparities, as some investigators have found that students are protected from differential selection and processing when they attend highly segregated schools or school districts (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Payne & Welch, 2010). Finally, several additional school-level covariates were excluded because preliminary analyses revealed they did not independently contribute to students’ odds of exclusionary discipline sanctions. These variables included the proportion of the student body that was eligible for free and reduced lunch, students who were not native English speakers, students with active placements in special education, school size, and school type (traditional, alternative, or charter). These variables have not been consistently related to school discipline outcomes in other studies (Arcia, 2007).

### 2.3. Data quality

This administrative dataset had very little missing data (n = 144) because it only included variables collected through mandatory fields in the districts’ student information system. The reliability of data entry and documentation of discipline incidents in this district has not been studied, but other research indicates that student information systems can provide reliable estimates of student problem behavior and discipline outcomes (e.g. Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011). In addition, this district conducted regular data quality checks of student discipline data during the study period. For example, the data quality office generated error alerts when attendance records indicated that a student was suspended or removed from the classroom but there was no corresponding discipline incident or resolution in the student information system. Each school must correct these errors prior to the district submitting reports to the state department of education. The district has also provided professional development for principals and site-based administrators to increase fidelity to district discipline policy and improve the accuracy of data entry into the student information system.

### 2.4. Analyses

A series of multilevel logistic regression models were employed using STATA 13 software (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2008). These models accounted for the nested structure of the dataset (students, level 1, within schools, level 2) and were used to estimate the relationships between risk and protective factors and receipt of an exclusionary discipline sanction (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).
3. Results

3.1. Office disciplinary referrals

As shown in Table 3 (Model 1), all student-level covariates were significantly associated with students’ odds of being referred to the office for discipline problems. Latino (OR 1.40, p < .001), Black (OR 2.30, p < .001), Native American (OR 1.29, p < .05) and Multiracial students (OR 1.50, p < .001) had significantly higher odds of office referral compared to White youth. Boys (OR 2.15, p < .001), youth eligible for free and reduced lunch (OR 2.37, p < .001), homeless students (OR 1.28, p < .001), native English speakers (OR 1.72, p < .001), youth in special education (OR 1.49, p < .001), and students designated as seriously emotionally disabled (OR 4.30, p < .0001) all had significantly higher odds of an office disciplinary referral. Students’ risk of office referral was also higher at middle schools (OR 3.87, p < .001) and those with greater concentrations of Black (OR 6.06, p < .001) and Latino (OR 2.84, p < .01) students. The only student-level protective effects observed for office disciplinary referrals was being Asian (OR 0.65, p < .001) or participating in the district’s gifted and talented program (OR 0.70, p < .001).

3.2. Suspension

Model 2 in Table 3 shows that, after accounting for all the reasons a student was referred to the office over the school year along with the interventions they received, fewer student-level covariates were significantly related to students’ odds of receiving an out-of-school suspension than an office discipline referral. In particular, free and reduced lunch eligibility, homelessness, participation in gifted and talented education, and enrollment in a middle school had no significant effect on a students’ risk of out-of-school suspension. With respect to race, only Black (OR 1.55, p < .001), and Multiracial students (OR 1.41, p < .05) had significantly higher odds of suspension compared to White youth. Boys (OR 1.21, p < .001), native English speakers (OR 1.13, p < .05), youth in special education (OR 1.17, p < .05), and students designated as seriously emotionally disabled (OR 2.48, p < .0001) also had significantly higher odds of out-of-school suspension.

Students’ risk of out-of-school suspension generally increased with the seriousness of the reasons for their office discipline referrals (Table 3, Model 2). For example, students’ odds of suspension were lower if they had been referred for destruction of school property (OR 2.78, p < .001) than if they were being disciplined for third degree assault (OR 19.82, p < .001). Students odds of suspension were also higher if they were placed on a behavior contract (18.10, p < .001), were referred to law enforcement (7.81, p < .001), or attended schools with higher proportions of Black (OR 17.25, p < .001) and Latino (OR 5.32, p < .001) students.

Two alternative responses to student misconduct protected youth from being suspended from school one or more times during the school year. Accounting for the seriousness of their offenses (referral reasons) and demographic covariates, students had lower odds of out-of-school suspension if they participated in a restorative approach to resolving their discipline problems (OR .73, p < .01) or an in-school suspension (OR .37, p < .001).

3.3. Law enforcement referrals

As shown in Model 3 (Table 3), only student-level factors increased youths’ odds of being referred to law enforcement. Compared to White students, Latino (OR 1.59, p < .05) and Black (OR 1.52, p < .05) youth had significantly greater odds of police involvement in their disciplinary incidents, accounting for other demographic variables and the seriousness of their offenses. Native speakers of English were also at greater risk of law enforcement referrals compared to English language learners (OR 1.31, p < .05). The only other variables that predicted police involvement in a disciplinary incident were the nature of the office disciplinary referral reasons. Like suspensions, risk of law enforcement referral increased with the seriousness of offense. None of the variables included in the model protected students from being referred to law enforcement.

3.4. Expulsion

Model 4 (Table 3) findings indicate that the only variables significantly related to students’ odds of expulsion were the seriousness of their offenses and their school’s grade configuration. Attending a middle school (OR 3.45, p < .01) and involvement in more serious infractions such as first degree assault (OR 7.89, p < .001) or possession of a dangerous weapon (OR 98.74, p < .001) increased students’ odds of expulsion. As was the case with law enforcement referrals, no factors in our analysis protected students from expulsion.

4. Discussion

4.1. The persistent effect of race

Study findings revealed that Black, Latino and Multiracial students were often punished more harshly than White students for the same offenses. Students attending schools with higher proportions of Black and Latino students were also at greater risk for school exclusion after accounting for student-level demographics and behaviors. These results mirror patterns observed by other investigators (Arcia, 2007; Hannon et al., 2013; Krezemien et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2011, 2013). Findings also suggest that higher rates of suspension and law enforcement referrals among Black and Latino students evident in descriptive district data were not solely the result of higher rates of misbehavior, poverty, or special education eligibility among these populations. Results indicate that these patterns also likely reflect differential selection of Black and Latino students for office referrals and differential processing in the application of discipline consequences (Gregory et al., 2010; Hannon et al., 2013). In light of these findings, efforts to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline sanctions in schools should target the attitudes and behaviors of school staff, not only those of students (Hemphill et al., 2014; Theriot et al., 2010).

Race effects weakened as students moved through the discipline process from office referral to expulsion. Office referral reasons were the only significant predictors of expulsion. To assess whether this result was due to the small number of students expelled (n = 73), the model was re-run with only key student demographics (race, gender, special education status, and emotional disability) as predictor variables. Only gender (male) increased a student’s odds of expulsion (OR 2.14, p < .01). Thus, the lower risk of differential processing by race at the expulsion level may be due to the increased administrative checks and balances that must be completed prior to expulsion. Unlike office referrals, suspensions, and law enforcement referrals, expulsion decisions are made by central district administrators and involve formal hearings that are mediated by an independent hearing officer.

4.2. The promise of alternatives to suspension

Most encouraging are findings indicating that two alternative approaches to resolving student misconduct appear to protect students from school exclusion. Results suggest that in-school suspension and restorative approaches are promising strategies to managing student discipline problems and keeping youth in an educational environment. 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. This holds true even after accounting for student demographic characteristics and discipline incidents over the course of a school year. This finding builds on theoretical, descriptive, and qualitative evidence of the effectiveness of these alternatives to suspension (González, 2012; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).
Thus, a critical area for future research is to conduct experimental studies on these interventions to rule out the influence of confounding or unmeasured variables and demonstrate the causal impact of these approaches on discipline outcomes.

4.3. The role of district-level discipline policy

The most influential predictors of exclusionary discipline sanctions in DPS during 2011–2012 were office referral reasons; these indicators reflect and capture school adults’ perceptions of student misbehavior (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). Study findings also indicate that students’ risk of suspension, law enforcement referral, and expulsion increased as their severity of offending increased. This is an encouraging finding in view of prior research indicating that “zero tolerance” approaches that seek to deter misbehavior through harsh consequences for all types of misconduct are less effective than graduated discipline systems that increase consequences with the seriousness of student offenses (Reynolds et al., 2008). This finding also suggests that school district policy, in this case a matrix of offenses, consequences, and interventions can have a positive influence on discipline practices in schools.

4.4. Additional risk and protective factors for school exclusion

This study identified several risk and protective factors for suspension that may be useful in advancing research on school discipline and informing practice among youth service providers. In addition to a student’s racial background, gender, special education status, and designation as seriously emotionally disabled were among the most salient risk factors for exclusionary discipline practices. These findings are consistent with a number of prior investigations that have reported high rates of suspension and expulsion for boys and students in special education, despite legal protections intended to prevent the exclusion of students with disabilities from school (Hannon et al., 2013; Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2011). Students in traditional middle schools also were at greater risk for office disciplinary referral and expulsion (Skiba et al., 2011). High rates of exclusionary discipline sanctions in middle schools have been attributed to stage-environment misfits between early adolescents’ developmental needs, especially autonomy, and the rigid structure of the middle school curriculum (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

In contrast, individual student characteristics were only protective at the point of office discipline referral. Being Asian and participating in the district’s gifted and talented program reduced students’ odds of entering the discipline process. The protective effect of being Asian may be capturing lower rates of externalizing problem behaviors among some Asian ethnic sub-groups (Anyon et al., 2013; Choi, 2008; Grunbaum, Lowry, Kann, &Pateman, 2000). Alternatively, it may reflect perceptions by school staff that these youth are less disruptive and aggressive than students of other racial backgrounds (Chang & Sue, 2003; Morris, 2005). Interventions that target adults’ preconceived ideas about Black, Latino, Native, and Multiracial youth and strengthen the individual relationships school adults have with these students may inhibit differential selection for office referrals. Similarly, the effect of being in the district’s gifted in talented program suggest that the enrichment and individualized teaching approaches used in classrooms for gifted students may prevent discipline challenges. Other studies have

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multilevel model predicting odds of discipline resolutions in all Denver Public Schools (2011–2012).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office referral</strong> (n = 87,997)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student level demographics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Race (comparison group = White students)</td>
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<td>Latino</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>Native American</td>
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<td>Eligible for free or reduced Lunch</td>
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<td>Native English speaker</td>
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<td>Gifted and talented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
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<td>Emotional disability</td>
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| Office disciplinary referral reasons (comparison group = students referred for all other reasons) | | | | |
| Destruction of school property | 2.78*** (1.94, 4.00) | .82 (.39, 1.75) | .74 (08, 653) |
| Disobedient/defiant | 3.08*** (2.70, 3.50) | 1.09 (.87, 1.37) | 1.26 (66, 241) |
| Other code of conduct violation | 3.25*** (2.79, 3.77) | 2.64*** (2.08, 3.36) | .69 (32, 146) |
| Bullying | 2.53*** (2.11, 3.07) | 1.46* (1.00, 2.14) | 1.47 (51, 425) |
| Detrimental behavior | 6.14*** (5.37, 7.02) | 2.13*** (1.67, 2.71) | .84 (44, 161) |
| Third degree assault | 19.82*** (13.27, 29.61) | 9.66** (5.75, 16.22) | 7.89*** (2.67, 23.89) |
| First degree assault | 3.16*** (64, 15.69) | 10.19*** (162, 63.87) | 365.80*** (376, 3554.5) |
| Drug possession or distribution | 27.17*** (20.67, 35.73) | 10.65*** (8.17, 13.88) | 80.00*** (364, 17.57) |
| Dangerous weapon | 11.86*** (7.66, 18.37) | 20.16*** (12.33, 32.94) | 98.74*** (46, 62, 211.9) |

| Alternative to suspension (comparison group = students who did not receive the intervention): | | | |
| In school suspension | 37*** (.33, 42) | .85 (.66, 1.08) | .79 (39, 160) |
| Restorative approach | .73*** (.57, 92) | 1.08 (.74, 1.58) | 1.77 (51, 619) |
| Behavior contract | 18.10*** (12.0, 27.3) | 2.30*** (1.61, 3.29) | 1.56 (57, 423) |

| School level controls | | | | |
| Middle school (vs. all others) | 3.87*** (2.34, 6.38) | 1.61 (.89, 29) | 2.30 (.90, 5.90) | 3.45*** (1.34, 8.87) |
| % Black | 6.06*** (1.63, 22.49) | 17.25*** (3.38, 88.02) | .15 (.01, 3.05) | 1.29 (02, 7102) |
| % Latino | 2.84*** (1.37, 5.91) | 5.31*** (2.06, 13.69) | .29 (.05, 6.13) | .57 (05, 628) |

* p < .05 statistical significance.
** p < .01 statistical significance.
*** p < .001 statistical significance.

* No Native American or Pacific Islander students were expelled during this school year.
demonstrated that an engaging curriculum and strong teacher–student relationships reduce students’ risk for office disciplinary referrals and suspensions, especially for students of color (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Gregory et al., 2013). Alternatively, the protective effect of being in gifted programming may reflect the benefits of higher IQ scores among this population and the tendency for gifted students to come from families with high socioeconomic status (McBee, 2006), two factors that reduce children’s risk of developing behavior problems in school (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Sprague & Hill, 2000).

5. Study limitations

Findings from this study are only generalizable to other school districts that have similar discipline policies, serving a comparable population of students in an urban setting. Further investigation of these patterns using a larger sample of schools and districts would substantially further knowledge development. Strengths of this study include the breadth of measures available in the DPS dataset and the subsequent inclusion of a wide variety of covariates in each of the tested models. On the other hand, the investigation was limited by the fact that our analysis did not include data assessing several key risk and protective factors for exclusionary sanctions that have been used previously in studies of school discipline, such as student age.

Moreover, measures of cultural and developmental mismatches between students, teachers, administrators, and/or the school environment are among the most theorized risk factors for school discipline outcomes (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Eccles & Roeser, 2009). Relevant factors include culturally unresponsive instruction, disagreements regarding appropriate behavior and consequences in school, and racial bias or misunderstanding in perceptions of student behavior (Chang & Sue, 2003; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Lau et al., 2004; Neal et al., 2003). Cultural mismatches between students and school staff can also lead to disengagement that manifests in disruptive or defiant behaviors, creating additional risk for disparities in referrals (Skiba et al., 2002). Administrator characteristics that are associated with racial disproportionalities in suspension and expulsion include a punitive orientation to discipline, believing that discipline problems stem from inadequacies in students’ home life, and relying on school security guards or police officers to manage behavior problems (Arca, 2007; Skiba et al., 2003, 2013). These attitudes and approaches may interact with racial bias and contribute to the trend observed in the literature of harsher consequences for students of color, particularly Black students (Hannon et al., 2013; Payne & Welch, 2010). Unfortunately, these cultural and administrative measures were not available in the DPS dataset. Future research can address these complex issues by collecting data to evaluate teacher and administrator attitudes and classroom practices that may mitigate or exacerbate differential selection and processing.

6. Conclusion

This study suggests that district policy reforms targeting administrative decision-making in the application of disciplinary consequences and interventions can reduce the use of exclusionary sanctions in schools. In particular, our findings provide new evidence in support of district policies that mandate graduated discipline systems and the use of alternatives to suspension. To our knowledge, this study is the first to use multilevel analyses to demonstrate that restorative approaches in response to student misconduct are promising alternatives to out of school suspension. These findings point to the potential of using restorative approaches to reform school discipline policies and practices. Additional tests of the effects of restorative approaches are needed to assess the consistency and strength of this new evidence.

At the same time, the practices mandated by DPS policy do not appear to eliminate racial disparities in school discipline, a persistent and vexing social problem in the United States. Our findings highlight the need to design, implement, and test preventive interventions in the classroom that can mitigate office disciplinary referrals of Black, Latino, Native, and Multiracial students. In other words, prevention efforts that target differential selection for office disciplinary referrals at the classroom level, not just differential processing for discipline sanctions at the administrative level, will be necessary to eliminate racial disparities. In this regard, evidence from school-based intervention trials may be helpful in developing new classroom strategies for reducing disparities in discipline practices, particularly those that strengthen teachers’ relationships with students of color (Fredricks et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2013; Jenson & Bender, 2014).

Priorities for future research include experimental trials of alternatives to suspension and classroom-based interventions like restorative approaches that appear to reduce students’ risk of school exclusion. Additional research is also needed to examine the efficacy of these approaches in reducing racial disparities in school discipline outcomes. Finally, partnerships like the one described in this manuscript offer an effective interdisciplinary approach to identifying the causes of and to testing the effects of existing or new preventive interventions. Such partnerships should be encouraged and implemented widely in the nation’s school districts.

References


The gap in achievement across racial and ethnic groups has been a focus of education research for decades, but the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of Black, Latino, and American Indian students has received less attention. This article synthesizes research on racial and ethnic patterns in school sanctions and considers how disproportionate discipline might contribute to lagging achievement among students of color. It further examines the evidence for student, school, and community contributors to the racial and ethnic patterns in school sanctions, and it offers promising directions for gap-reducing discipline policies and practices.

Keywords: achievement gap; at-risk students; classroom management; school psychology; student behavior/attitude; violence

Although our national discourse on racial disparity tends to focus on academic outcomes—the so-called achievement gap—in school districts throughout the United States, Black, Latino, and American Indian students are also subject to a differential and disproportionate rate of school disciplinary sanctions, ranging from office disciplinary referrals to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Ostensibly, the intent of school disciplinary interventions is to preserve order and safety by removing students who break school rules and disrupt the school learning environment and, by setting an example of those punished students, to deter other students from committing future rule infractions. However, schools tend to rely heavily on exclusion from the classroom as the primary discipline strategy (Arcia, 2006), and this practice often has a disproportionate impact on Black, Latino, and American Indian students. The use of school exclusion as a discipline practice may contribute to the well-documented racial gaps in academic achievement. This suggests that there is a pressing need for scholarly attention to the racial discipline gap if efforts addressing the achievement gap are to have greater likelihood of success.

In this article, we synthesize the research on racial and ethnic patterns in school discipline, and we suggest how the racial discipline gap influences racial patterns in achievement. We then review the evidence on the factors that contribute to the discipline gap. Specifically, we examine the degree to which low-income status, low achievement, and rates of misconduct contribute to why Black, Latino, and American Indian students are overselected and oversanctioned in the discipline system. We argue that such student characteristics are not adequate to explain the large disparities, and we describe school and teacher contributors that need to be investigated in future research. Finally, we identify methodological challenges to the study of disproportionality and discuss promising strategies for gap-reducing interventions.

Safety Efforts and Racial Disproportionality

A large body of evidence shows that Black students are subject to a disproportionate amount of discipline in school settings, and a smaller and less consistent literature suggests disproportionate sanctioning of Latino and American Indian students in some schools. This conclusion has been drawn across a wide array of sanctions (e.g., suspensions, office discipline referrals) and methodology (see discussion below). The Children's Defense Fund (1975) first brought the issue of racial disproportionality to national attention, showing that Black students were two to three times overrepresented in school suspensions compared with their enrollment rates in localities across the nation. National and state data show consistent patterns of Black disproportionality in school discipline over the past 30 years, specifically in suspension (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002), expulsion (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007), and office discipline referrals (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). According to a nationally representative study utilizing parent reports, in 2003 Black students were significantly more likely to be suspended than White or Asian students (p < .001). Specifically, almost 1 in 5 Black students (19.6%) were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students (8.8%) and Asian and Pacific Islanders (6.4%; KewelRamani et al., 2007). A nationally representative survey of 74,000 10th graders found that about 50% of Black students reported that they had ever been suspended or expelled compared with their enrollment rates in localities across the nation. National and state data show consistent patterns of Black disproportionality in school discipline over the past 30 years, specifically in suspension (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002), expulsion (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007), and office discipline referrals (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). According to a nationally representative study utilizing parent reports, in 2003 Black students were significantly more likely to be suspended than White or Asian students (p < .001). Specifically, almost 1 in 5 Black students (19.6%) were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students (8.8%) and Asian and Pacific Islanders (6.4%; KewelRamani et al., 2007). A nationally representative survey of 74,000 10th graders found that about 50% of Black students reported that they had ever been suspended or expelled compared with about 20% of White students (Wallace et al., 2008). The study further showed that, unlike the pattern for other racial and ethnic groups, suspensions and expulsions of Black students increased from 1991 to 2005 (Wallace et al., 2008).
Although disproportionality in school discipline has been documented for Latino and American Indian students, findings related to such disparities have been inconsistent. National data (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003) show that, based on parent surveys administered in 1999, 20% of Latino students in Grades 7 through 12 had ever been suspended or expelled, which is a statistically significantly lower rate ($p < .001$) than for Black students (35%) and a statistically significantly higher rate ($p < .001$) than for White students (15%). Analyzing racial disparities in discipline, Gordon, Della Piana, and Kelehler (2000) found that, in 3 of the 10 cities studied, the rates of suspended and expelled Latino students were 10% or more than 10% higher than the percentage of enrolled Latino students. Inconsistency in findings was further confirmed in a study measuring disproportionality using odds ratios. Based on state records from Maryland, Krezmien et al. (2006) found that Latino students had similar or lower odds than White students of being suspended for 9 successive years (1995–2003).

National and state data have also shown disproportionality in discipline for American Indian students, although again there appears to be some inconsistency (Wallace et al., 2008). Krezmien et al. (2006) showed that American Indian and White students had a similar chance of being suspended from 1995 to 1998 in Maryland. However, from 1998 to 2003, they found that American Indians had significantly higher odds than Whites of being suspended (odds ratios ranged from 1.5 to 1.8). The disproportionality in American Indian suspension was again documented in nationally representative samples using school records (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008) and student reports (Wallace et al., 2008). It is unclear whether the inconsistent findings on American Indian suspension is a statistical artifact given their relatively small numbers of suspended students (e.g., Krezmien et al., 2006) or if it reflects actual variability in proportionate suspension rates across time and school districts.

Males of all racial and ethnic groups are more likely than females to receive disciplinary sanctions. In 2004, only 1% of Asian Pacific Islander females were suspended, compared with 11% of Asian Pacific Islander males (KewelRamani et al., 2007). Expulsion data from that same year showed that White females were half as likely to be expelled as White males ($p < .001$), and similarly, Black females were half as likely to be expelled as Black males ($p < .05$). Black males are especially at risk for receiving discipline sanctions, with one study showing that Black males were 16 times as likely as White females to be suspended (J. F. Gregory, 1997).

### Racial Disproportionality and Patterns in Achievement

The consistent pattern of disproportionate discipline sanctions issued to Black students and the trends in sanctions for Latino and American Indian students, albeit less consistent, have rarely been considered in light of the well-documented racial and ethnic disparities in school achievement (KewelRamani et al., 2007). In many schools, large proportions of a group (e.g., Black males) receive at least one suspension, which typically results in missed instructional time and, for some, could exacerbate a cycle of academic failure, disengagement, and escalating rule breaking (Arcia, 2006). In fact, a suspended student may miss anywhere from one class period to 10 or more school days, depending on the violation and school policies. One of the most consistent findings of modern education research is the strong positive relationship between time engaged in academic learning and student achievement (Brophy, 1988; Fisher et al., 1981; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). The school disciplinary practices used most widely throughout the United States may be contributing to lowered academic performance among the group of students in greatest need of improvement.

Research shows that frequent suspensions appear to significantly increase the risk of academic underperformance (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Arcia (2006) followed two demographically similar cohorts (matched on gender, race, grade level, family poverty, and limited English proficiency), contrasting a cohort that had received at least one suspension with another that had received no suspensions. In Year 1, suspended students were three grade levels behind their nonsuspended peers in their reading skills, but were almost 5 years behind 2 years later. Although other unmeasured risk factors may have contributed to cohort differences, suspension may have initiated or maintained a process of withdrawal from learning in the classroom. In the long term, school suspension has been found to be a moderate to strong predictor of dropout and not graduating on time (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Discipline sanctions resulting in exclusion from school may damage the learning process in other ways as well. Suspected students may become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and course work, and subsequently, less motivated to achieve academic success. Students who are less bonded to school may be more likely to turn to lawbreaking activities and become less likely to experience academic success. Consistent findings highlight the importance of school bonding for reducing the risk of delinquency (Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004). Conversely, Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, and Catalano (2006) found that taking into account previous violent and aggressive behavior and a multitude of other risk factors (e.g., negative peer group, low grades), school suspension actually increased the risk of antisocial behavior a year later. In sum, disproportionate school discipline experienced by some racial and ethnic groups has important implications for academic outcomes. There is a need for research to identify why racial disproportionality in discipline occurs and what types of disciplinary practices might be less likely to exacerbate academic outcomes.

### Explanations for the Racial Discipline Gap

Certain demographic characteristics that are more common among some racial and ethnic groups have been used as a primary explanation for the racial discipline gap (see, e.g., National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2000). Low-income students with histories of low achievement, who reside in high-crime/high-poverty neighborhoods, may be at greater risk for engaging in behavior resulting in office disciplinary referrals and school suspension. A review of the literature suggests that such characteristics likely account for some proportion of the gap in sanctions across groups. Yet there is no evidence to suggest demographic factors are in any way sufficient to “explain away” the gap. Teacher and school factors need to be considered as possible...
Poverty and Neighborhood Characteristics

Race, socioeconomic status (SES), and characteristics of neighborhoods associated with risk of negative outcomes are frequently connected in the United States (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; McLoyd, 1998). The confluence of these factors makes it challenging to separate out the contributions of each to the racial discipline gap. Many low-income students living in urban neighborhoods may experience adversity, such as exposure to violence and substance abuse, which may increase the likelihood of their receiving school sanctions (Brantlinger, 1991; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). Although there is no evidence that exposure to violence causes behavior difficulties, correlational studies show links between exposure to violence and student mental health and behavior in the classroom (e.g., Kuther & Fisher, 1998). Many violence-exposed children suffer from anxiety, irritability, stress, and hypervigilence (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998). These conditions may have a negative effect upon behavior in classrooms and result in increased discipline referrals.

Exposure to violence may also influence how students cope in school. One coping mechanism to ward off the threat of violence includes presenting a “tough front” or even arming oneself to ward off future victimization (Anderson, 1999; Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2006). The need to negotiate what Anderson has called the “code of the street” may contribute to behavior problems in school as students from high-crime neighborhoods adjust to a different set of norms in their interactions with peers and teachers in school settings (Dance, 2002). Additional research is needed to tease apart community effects (e.g., concentrated poverty, neighborhood crime, and the stress of low SES) and their impact on student behavior in school.

It is important to distinguish, however, between the role of poverty in predicting disruptive behavior and the ways it may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in discipline. Existing school discipline research suggests that student SES is limited in its explanatory power of the racial discipline gap (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wallace et al., 2008). Whether statistically controlling for a measure of SES at the school level (percentage of parents unemployed or percentage of students enrolled in free or reduced-cost meals; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982) or at the student level (parental education or qualification for free or reduced-cost meals; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002), multivariate analyses have repeatedly demonstrated that racial differences in discipline rates remain significant. The most recent of these analyses (Wallace et al., 2008) used a series of logistic regressions to test racial/ethnic disparities in office disciplinary referrals, suspension, and expulsion. Race/ethnicity remained a significant predictor of all three disciplinary outcomes even after accounting for student-reported parental education, family structure (e.g., single-parent household), and urbanicity of neighborhood. In sum, being enrolled in a school with high rates of low-income students (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Wu et al., 1982) or being from a low-income family (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002) does increase the likelihood that a student will be subject to punitive forms of discipline and even appears to make a mild contribution to disproportionality (Wallace et al., 2008). Yet the highly consistent finding that race/ethnicity remains a significant predictor of discipline even after statistically controlling for measures of family income suggests that student SES is not sufficient to explain the racial discipline gap.

In fact, some research has found an inverse relationship between student demographics and rates of disproportionality in school discipline. Rausch and Skiba (2004), examining suspension and expulsion records across one Midwestern state, reported that Black students are at greater risk of suspension when compared with White students, not in urban schools but, rather, in more resource-rich suburban schools. Other research suggests that the context of school or district racial climate may have an influence on rates of disproportionality. Thornton and Trent (1988) reported that racial disproportionality in school suspension was greatest in schools that had been recently desegregated, especially if those schools had a higher SES student population. Conversely, Eitle and Eitle (2004) found decreased rates of disproportionality in school suspension in schools that became resegregated. Such data suggest that, at the school and district levels, financial resources, staff perceptions, and racial climate may be as important as student demographics in predicting racial disparity.

Low Achievement

Low achievement is another variable that may contribute to the racial discipline gap. A wide body of research documents a persistent pattern that Asian and White students score higher on achievement tests compared with Black, Latino, and American Indian students (A. Gregory & Weinstein, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Faced with repeated academic struggles, underperforming students may become frustrated and disaffected and have lower self-confidence, all of which may contribute to a higher rate of school disruption (Miles & Stipek, 2006). Low literacy achievement in the elementary grades is linked to later aggression in third and fifth grades (Miles & Stipek, 2006). Similar patterns have been found in later grades—low achievement in middle and high school is linked with more serious forms of aggression a year later (Choi, 2007). Although it is clear that low achievement is highly correlated with aggressive behavior and disciplinary infractions, such patterns in and of themselves do not explain disproportionality in discipline. Studies of the relationship between achievement and student discipline have shown that when taking into account grade point average, race remains a predictor of suspension (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Moreover, it is also possible that any relationship between the achievement gap and the discipline gap is in fact the product of other variables, such as educational disadvantage. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that what is widely viewed as an achievement gap between White and Black students could more properly be termed an “education debt” in that educational opportunities in the United States have historically never been equalized for different groups. McLloyd (1998) notes that poverty’s effects on students are mediated not simply by family or community risk factors but also by poor school conditions in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Poor students of color are more likely to attend schools with lower quality resources and facilities (Kozol, 2005),
higher teacher turnover, and a lower percentage of highly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Discrepancies in the quality of resources available to rich and poor districts are well documented, but there is a need for sound policy research that can specify how to address resource disparities in order to positively affect both the achievement gap and the discipline gap.

**Differential Behavior**

Another explanation for the racial discipline gap is that students from certain racial and ethnic groups misbehave or contribute to a lack of safety in schools more than students from other racial and ethnic groups. Studies using both measures of student self-report and extant school disciplinary records have examined this premise and have generally failed to find evidence of racial differences in student behavior (e.g., Skiba et al., 2002; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). In one of the earliest longitudinal studies of student race and school sanctions for misbehavior, Wehlage and Rutter examined predictors of school sanctions for 7th, 9th, and 11th graders over a 3-year period and reported that Black students did not consistently report more misbehavior than White students. This failure to find consistently large racial and ethnic differences in student self-reported behavior has been corroborated in the literature (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wu et al., 1982). A recent study using a nationally representative sample showed few and generally small differences in self-reported unsafe behavior across racial groups compared with the racial discrepancy in discipline sanctions (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007). There were, for example, no differences in self-reported weapon carrying among Black, White, and American Indian students. Some of the most recent data on school safety (Bauer, Guerino, Nolle, & Tang, 2008) show that victimization by violence or theft is not statistically differentiated by race, with similar percentages of White (4.7%), Black (3.8%), and Latino (3.9%) students reporting that they had been victimized in the past 6 months in school.

The use of self-report data, however, can raise questions about the accuracy of the student reporters and hence the validity of the results. Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979) hypothesized that the failure to find differences between Black and White self-report of serious delinquent behavior could be due to underreporting by Black youth. Studies examining this hypothesis, however, have failed to find support for it. McCarthy and Hoge (1987) examined whether Black students, more than White students, underreported their rule-breaking behavior. Comparing student self-report with a sample of teacher reports of rule breaking from a sample of 1,125 7th and 11th graders, the researchers found no clear pattern that teacher reports were more highly correlated with either White or Black self-reports of misconduct, and they concluded that neither group tended to systematically under- or over-report their misconduct.

The findings of self-report data have also been corroborated by studies using extant school data on office referrals, which have also failed to find substantial differences in rates of disruptive school behavior by race. McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang (1992), studying discipline records in a single Florida school district, found no general differences in behavior between White and Black students and indeed found that White students engaged in a higher level of those behaviors (e.g., defiance, fighting, and bothering others) that tended to result in suspension or corporal punishment. Similarly, Shaw and Braden (1990) reported that White children in a single school district were significantly more likely than Black children to be referred for disciplinary action for severe rule violations, despite the overrepresentation of Black students in that district in corporal punishment. Finally, Skiba et al. (2002) set out specifically to test the differential behavior hypothesis, using disciplinary referrals from all 19 middle schools in a single large urban district. They found no evidence that either Black or White students were referred to the office for more serious behaviors. The analyses did show, however, that reasons for referring White students tended to be for causes that were more objectively observable (smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, obscene language), whereas office referrals for Black students were more likely to occur in response to behaviors (loitering, disrespect, threat, excessive noise) that appear to be more subjective in nature. In short, there appears to be a notable paucity of evidence that could support a hypothesis that the racial discipline gap can be explained through differential rates of misbehavior.

**Differential Selection**

In juvenile justice research, there has been a similar focus on exploring disproportionate minority contact in the justice system (Piquero, 2008). Some of this research has sought to identify whether the high incarceration rates of ethnic minority youth, compared with the rates of White youth, are due to their higher rates of illegal behavior or due to institutional practices such as patterns in police surveillance, racial profiling, or biased sentencing (Piquero, 2008). This research provides a useful framework for understanding discrimination as a contributor to the racial discipline gap in schools. Specifically, the “differential selection” hypothesis asserts that ethnic minorities are more likely to be arrested because they are more likely to be picked out for wrongdoing despite similar levels of infractions (Piquero, 2008). This hypothesis is useful when applied to the school setting; that is, despite relatively similar rates of disruption, Black, Latino, or American Indian students may be more likely to be differentially selected for discipline consequences.

There is a fairly substantial research base suggesting that differential selection at the classroom level contributes in some way to racial/ethnic disproportionality in school disciplinary outcomes. Consistent findings of disproportionality in office referrals (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008) suggest that racial/ethnic disparities in discipline begin at the classroom level. In an ethnographic observational study of urban classrooms, Vavrus and Cole (2002) found that many office referrals leading to school suspension were due to what the authors described as a student’s “violation of implicit interactional codes,” most often a student calling into question established classroom practices or the teacher’s authority. Those students singled out in this way were disproportionately students of color. Skiba et al. (2002) reported on findings of referrals based on objective versus subjective reasons by race. Together with findings that Black students are more likely than White students to be referred to the office for defiance (A. Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) or noncompliance (Skiba et al., 2008), these results strongly suggest that
some process of differential selection at the classroom level may contribute to disparities in discipline.

Explanations for the overselection of certain students for discipline may include cultural mismatch, implicit bias, or negative expectations in classrooms and schools. The cultural mismatch hypothesis suggests that the classroom culture or the teacher’s culture is at odds with the culture of ethnic minority students (Irvine, 2002; Townsend, 2000). For instance, Boykin and colleagues argued that Western European–based individualism and competitiveness are the dominant underlying ideologies guiding classroom activities (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005)—an orientation that may clash with a stronger emphasis on communal values in Black, Latino, and American Indian culture (Gay, 2006). Gay further suggested that communicative tensions can arise through cultural difference. Specifically, differences in ways of communicating between Blacks (e.g., animated, interpersonal) and Whites (e.g., dispassionate, impersonal) may lead to conflict (Kochman, 1981). In a study of 62 White elementary teachers who taught in two predominantly Black schools, Tyler, Boykin, and Walton (2006) found that teachers were more likely to rate vignettes of students who exhibited competitive and individualistic behavior as motivated and achievement oriented than students who exhibited more communal and veristic (e.g., collaborative and multitasking) behaviors. Such findings, if validated in actual classroom settings, would indicate a differential perception on the part of teachers that could well advantage White students exhibiting competitive behaviors and disadvantage Black students exhibiting a more active and community-oriented learning style.

Other scholars have focused on ways in which negative teacher beliefs and expectations can contribute to racially related authority conflicts (R. S. Weinstein, 2002; R. S. Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). In her ethnography of school discipline in an elementary school, Ferguson (2000) observed patterns in negative teacher–student interactions and argued that these events were fueled by White teachers’ overreacting and relying on stereotypes to interpret Black students’ language and physical expression. Given stereotypes and media portrayals of Black youth as dangerous and aggressive (Devine & Elliot, 2000; Noguera & Akom, 2000), teacher expectations for behavior may also influence whether these students are selected for discipline sanctions. A related area of research examines how implicit beliefs may negatively affect Black and Latino students. Implicit racial bias, according to social psychologists, operates out of conscious awareness yet influences decision making (e.g., Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). Although no studies have been conducted on the implicit bias of teachers and how race may activate stereotypes, Graham and Lowery (2004) conducted an analogous experimental study with police and probation officers. They found that, compared with officers who were subliminally primed with neutral, non-race-related words, officers who had been subliminally primed with words related to the category Black were more likely to recommend harsher punishments for adolescents who had committed crimes, as presented in standardized, written vignettes.

Taken together, research on classroom processes suggests that Black students are differentially selected for discipline referral (e.g., Skiba et al., 2002), although there is insufficient data to establish why this may occur. Several reasons may include societal stereotypes, implicit bias, or cultural mismatch between teachers and Black students. To advance research in this area, a systematic line of mixed-methods research is needed, using observational studies of classroom interactions and interviews of teachers and students concerning the process of school discipline. Coding of teacher–student interactions could help identify whether teachers are more or less tolerant of racially specific deviations from implicit behavioral standards in the classroom.

Differential Processing

The differential processing hypothesis asserts that discrimination occurs in the courts and correctional systems, which leads to a disproportionate arrest and incarceration rate of minorities (Piquero, 2008). Subjective judgments in sanctioning may be detrimental to Black, Latino, and American Indian youth. Morrison (Morrison et al., 2001; Morrison & Skiba, 2001) noted that the application of school consequences such as suspension and expulsion represents less a discrete event than a complex process whose outcome is influenced simultaneously by student behavior, teacher classroom management, administrator perspectives, and school policy. There is tremendous local flexibility in the types of infractions that move forward from the classroom to the office and in the types of consequences issued by administrators. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 mandates a 1-year expulsion for the possession of firearms at school, but such consequences can be modified based on the discretion of the district administration. Thus, in general, there is considerable flexibility in the type and length of sanction students receive for an infraction. For the same offense, one administrator may decide to mandate a conference with parents or guardians; a different administrator may mandate a 5-day suspension (Noguera & Yonemura Wing, 2006).

The most well-documented gap in sanctions is between Black and White students. Wéhlagé and Rutter (1986) found that Black students were more likely than White students to report being sent to the principal’s office and were more likely than White students to report being suspended even though they did not report higher incidents of misbehavior, across 2 years of study. These findings suggest a discrepancy between sanctions and student-reported behavior. Indeed, it may be that Black students are suspended and punished for behavior that is less serious than the behavior of other students. McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang (1992) reported that Black pupils in a Florida school district were more likely than White students to receive severe punishments (e.g., corporal punishment, school suspension) and less likely to receive milder consequences (e.g., in-school suspension). These results are consistent with findings that Black students were referred for corporal punishment for less serious behavior than were other students (Shaw & Braden, 1990). These findings, as a whole, suggest harsh sanctions issued to Black students may contribute to their overrepresentation in discipline data.

Methodological Issues and Recommendations

Although the concept of disproportionate representation seems straightforward, its measurement can be complex, as demonstrated in special education research (Skiba et al., 2008). The composition index (Donovan & Cross, 2002) compares the proportion
of those served in special education represented by a given ethnic group with the proportion that group represents in the population or in school enrollment. For example, Black students account for 33% of students identified as mentally retarded at the national level, clearly discrepant from their 17% representation in the school-aged population (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Although an intuitive measure, problems with interpretation and scaling of the composition index measure have led the field toward use of the risk index and risk ratio (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Skiba et al., 2008; Westat, 2005). The risk index is the proportion of a given group in a given category; at the national level, 2.64% of all Black students enrolled in the public schools are identified as mentally retarded (Donovan & Cross, 2002). To interpret the risk index, a ratio of the risk of the target group to one or more groups may be constructed, termed a risk ratio (Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Parrish, 2002). Comparison of Black student risk for identification as mentally retarded (2.64%) with the White risk index of 1.18% for that category yields a risk ratio of 2.24 (2.64/1.18), suggesting that Black students are over two times more likely to be served in the category mental retardation than White students. The same data can also be used to compute an odds ratio (Finn, 1982), often drawn from logistic regression (Wallace et al., 2008). In contrast to the risk ratio, the odds ratios assesses both occurrence and nonoccurrence data.

Methodological issues in the measurement of disproportionality remain outstanding, including criteria for determining a significant level of disproportionality (Bollmer, Bethel, Garrison-Mogren, & Brauen, 2007; Skiba et al., 2008), the appropriate comparison group when calculating risk ratios (Westat, 2004), and the comparability of risk and odds ratios (Davies, Crombie, & Tavakoli, 1998). In the face of national special education law mandating the identification of significant disproportionality at the local level, however, criteria for making that determination are necessary. Thus, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs issued policy guidance to state and local education agencies regarding the calculation and interpretation of risk indices and risk ratios (Westat, 2004, 2005), which has implications for how disproportionality in discipline sanctions could be identified. The Office of Special Education Programs recommends that a risk ratio can be used to understand the relative risk of students receiving special education services for different racial and ethnic groups (Westat, 2005). The office cautions, however, that risk ratios are difficult to interpret when based on small numbers of students in a racial and ethnic group. It further describes the benefits of a weighted risk ratio, which takes into account differences in the size of racial and ethnic groups. This allows for comparison of risk ratios across districts with varying racial and ethnic composition.

Improved measurement of the racial discipline gap should advance substantive areas of inquiry. One important area relates to the unique contributions of student, teacher, school, and family and neighborhood to the racial discipline gap. As of yet, there have been no comprehensive studies or systematic lines of research that have disentangled the unique effects of these contributors. Education researchers might follow the lead of a recent study by Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush (2005) on the gap in community violence between White, Black, and Latino young adults, which offers a guide for ecologically sensitive research on race and discipline. Using data from almost 3,000 young adults in 180 Chicago neighborhoods, Sampson and colleagues identified the unique contributions of individual, home, and neighborhood variables to the relative odds of self-reported violence for each racial and ethnic group. The apparent multi-level causation of disciplinary disproportionality strongly suggests that multivariate procedures, in particular hierarchical approaches (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), will be most appropriate in future research. The next generation of research could simultaneously consider the effects of student attitude and behavior, teacher tolerance and classroom management skills, administrative leadership, school climate, and school and community demographics on the racial discipline gap.

Following the lead from research on the juvenile justice system (Piquero, 2008), systematic lines of research on the chain of events that culminate in suspension and expulsion are needed. Unfair selection and sanction at various points in the discipline process could additively contribute to the discipline gap. Another crucial area of research needs to test mechanisms and develop theory regarding the conscious and unconscious processes that result in differential treatment of some racial and ethnic groups. Previous research has shown that cultural mismatch between teachers and students can contribute to misunderstandings, fear, and conflict with respect to pedagogy (Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings 1995; Pollack, 2008); further research is needed on the extent to which such processes also contribute to inequitable disciplinary practices. Social class, immigrant status, racial and ethnic identity, neighborhood and familial diversity, and educator training and perspectives may all affect student behavior, teacher responses, or their interaction. Clearly, conducting research that could truly sort out the numerous and interacting sources of variance contributing to disciplinary disproportionality is challenging. Subtle and implicit processes related to racial bias, negative expectations, or stereotypes are not easily detected outside of controlled laboratory conditions, and it is not a simple matter to observe the complex and interactive social processes that can contribute to an escalating sequence of actions and reactions during actual discipline encounters.

Identifying the characteristics of resilient schools is another important next step in research on racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline. In the field of public health, research has established a strong link between community violence and manifestations of school violence (Ozer, 2005). Not surprisingly, schools in areas with a high incidence of crime and violence also tend to experience higher rates of violence and disorder (Noguera, 2003). Yet the presence of schools that demonstrate positive outcomes despite their location in high-risk neighborhoods (e.g., Welsh, Greene, & Jenkins, 1999) strongly suggests that neighborhood and family disadvantage be approached in research and practice as conditions that increase educational challenge, rather than as limiting conditions. In particular, there is a need for additional research on the types of strategies schools can implement to reduce the effects of violence in neighboring communities.

Disciplinary Practices, Prevention Programming, and School Reform

Existing research on the racial discipline gap suggests that, similar to efforts that address the achievement gap or the disproportionate
number of Black students placed in special education (Skiba et al., 2008), no single causal factor can fully explain racially disparate discipline, and no single action will therefore be sufficient to ameliorate it. Multifaceted strategies may offer promise, but there is as yet no empirical research testing specific interventions for reducing the discipline gap.

Given the lack of systematic research addressing the effectiveness of gap-reducing interventions, promising directions must be extrapolated from other intervention research. Freiberg and Lapointe (2006) reviewed 40 school-based programs targeting the reduction of behavior problems in schools. Of those, 29 were implemented with Black, Latino, urban, and low-income students and offered some evidence for their success in increasing student problem solving and/or reducing difficulties in classroom management for participants as a whole. Freiberg and Lapointe identified commonalities among those effective programs. The programs move beyond discipline, emphasizing student learning and self-regulation, not simply procedures for addressing rule infractions. They encourage “school connectedness” and “caring and trusting relationships” between teachers and students. Overall, the programs try to increase students’ positive experience of schooling and to move away from a reliance on punitive reactions to misbehavior.

The programmatic commonalities described by Freiberg and Lapointe (2006) offer a promising direction for lowering the oversanctioning of Black, Latino, and American Indian students. Yet universal approaches to educational practice have frequently been criticized for not specifically addressing the racial dynamics, economic stressors, or other influences on the racial discipline gap (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). In a national sample of schools at the elementary and middle school level that implemented positive behavior supports for at least a year, Skiba et al. (2008) reported generally positive findings before disaggregation by race but significant disciplinary disproportionality for Black and Latino students in both office disciplinary referrals and administrative consequences when the data were disaggregated. Explicit attention to issues of race and culture may be necessary for sustained change in racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities.

Studies of successful teachers of Black students support the idea that teachers differ from one another in their ability to elicit cooperation and diffuse conflict. A. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) found that teachers who elicited trust and cooperation with their Black students tended to use an authoritative style of teaching—one in which teachers showed both caring and high expectations. These “warm demanders” (Irvine, 2002) may provide cultural synchronization between authority in the home and in the school. Teachers’ use of humor, emotions, and colloquial expressions are other avenues through which cultural synchrony may occur (Monroe & Obidah, 2004; C. S. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Additional research on preservice teacher training and professional development is needed to ascertain if an increase in teacher cultural responsiveness or synchrony with students is linked to lower discipline referrals for Black, Latino, and American Indian students.

Overall, little is known about the types of interventions that reduce the racial discipline gap. Given the research on possible contributors to the gap, a variety of strategies may be needed, including (a) increasing the awareness of teachers and administrators of the potential for bias when issuing referrals for discipline, (b) utilizing a range of consequences in response to behavior problems, (c) treating exclusion as a last resort rather than the first or only option, (d) making a concerted effort to understand the roots of behavior problems, and (e) finding ways to reconnect students to the educational mission of schools during disciplinary events (Noguera, 2007).

Summary

The racial and ethnic disparity in discipline sanctions has not received the attention it deserves. Few studies have examined where and why disproportionality between Black and White students is on the increase, especially for Black females (Wallace et al., 2008). Discipline trends for Latinos have been inconsistently documented. Given the diversity of Latinos in the United States (e.g., immigrant status, country of origin), in-depth examinations of different Latino groups is needed (e.g., first-generation Mexican American, third-generation Cuban American). Moreover, comparisons of schools with racial diversity versus racial homogeneity would be informative. Such research would then lend itself to inquiry about why such trends exist in school discipline.

Unfortunately, the discourse on racial and ethnic disproportionality seems to be constrained by simplistic dichotomies that artificially pit individual student characteristics (e.g., student aggression, disengagement from school) against systemic factors (e.g., school administrators’ implicit bias, community violence) as the reason why some groups are overrepresented in suspension or expulsion (Skiba et al., 2008). The multiple and interacting variables that appear to contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in discipline demand a more comprehensive and nuanced approach. More sophisticated statistical methodologies such as hierarchical linear modeling or sequential analysis (Gottman & Roy, 1990) may prove to be better suited for modeling the complexity of inequitable outcomes in school discipline.

At this time, however, little is known about the efficacy or effectiveness of possible “gap-reducing” interventions. What types of interventions might successfully increase teacher and administrator awareness of the potential for bias when issuing referrals for discipline? Do interventions aimed at using exclusion as a last resort rather than the first or only option reduce the gap in referrals across racial and ethnic groups? Will interventions aimed at reducing the achievement gap, such as access to rigorous curriculum and caring teacher–student relationships, be accompanied by a narrowed discipline gap? Can gap-reducing interventions draw on universal approaches, or do they need targeted, culturally specific approaches that respond to the students’ cultural and socioeconomic contexts? Effectively addressing these questions poses a serious challenge to researchers, as it necessarily involves attention to the complex, politically charged, and often personally threatening topic of race. Yet creativity and perseverance will be necessary to craft such research if we are to understand and develop interventions that can effectively reduce the racial discipline gap.

Note

Rarely does research differentiate between expulsion resulting in alternative educational services or exclusion from such services. As a result, this review must rely on a broad usage of the term expulsion.
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Manuscript received June 24, 2009
Revision received October 20, 2009
Accepted November 2, 2009
Module 3: The Role of Implicit Bias in Discipline Decisions
You Can’t Fix What You Don’t Look At: Acknowledging Race in Addressing Racial Discipline Disparities

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Abstract
Racial/ethnic stereotypes are deep rooted in our history; among these, the dangerous Black male stereotype is especially relevant to issues of differential school discipline today. Although integration in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education was intended to counteract stereotype and bias, resegregation has allowed little true integration. Thus, old patterns continue to be reinforced through the ongoing processes of implicit bias, micro-aggression, and colorblindness. Thus, to effectively address inequity, the role of race must be explicitly acknowledged in addressing racial disparities in discipline. We close with a set of recommendations for talking about and acting on racial disparities.

Keywords
discipline, disproportionality, racial/ethnic disparities, suspension and expulsion, stereotypes, effective disciplinary practices

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There are very few African American men in this country who haven’t had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven’t had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me—at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven’t had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often.

—President Barack Obama, July 19, 2013

Recent national tragedies—the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile—keep issues of race at the forefront of our national consciousness. As much as we try to look away from the issues created by the idea and social/material realities of race in America, events remind us time and time again that our society’s racial dividing lines, especially those involving Black males, can have serious, even deadly consequences. Those divisions and their consequences extend beyond the streets into most of our institutions—including schools, where many current disciplinary, suspension, and expulsion practices exacerbate inequality and perpetuate a widening chasm among different racial and ethnic groups.

Racial and ethnic differences in everyday experience in schools remain ubiquitous in American education. Students of different races and ethnicities in U.S. schools experience fundamentally different school compositions (Orfield, 2009); different educational opportunities and resources (Carter & Welner, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006), different rates of referral to both special education (National Research Council, 2002) and gifted education (Milner & Ford, 2007); and different dropout and graduation rates (Wald & Losen, 2007). As the research cited in the Discipline Disparities Series indicates (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014), ongoing severe and consistent racial disparities in school suspensions and expulsion lead to a variety of other negative outcomes: The more students are removed from school through suspension and expulsion, the more they vanish from graduation stages and fill the pipeline to prison.

Like other indicators of inequality in education, racial disproportionality in discipline, suspensions, and expulsions did not simply emerge full blown in recent years. Racial discipline disparities are a consequence of U.S. history, of the biases and stereotypes created by that history, and of the still-strong divisions in lived experience between groups that we call “races.” It is impossible to tell the full story of racial discipline disparities without
considering the full range of racialized historical and current factors that shape school life in the United States. The ravages of slavery and Jim Crow, forced migration, and policies that enforced unequal treatment placed African Americans and most people of color at an economic and social disadvantage that persists to this day. Some of our most disadvantaged schools, more often than not populated by Black and brown skinned youth, keenly show the effects of poverty within their walls, engendering frustrations and exacerbating potential conflicts among students and between teachers and students. Regrettably, our history also left us with pervasive and false ideas about “races” that have shaped our perceptions of who is valued and who is not, who is capable and who is not, and who is “safe” and who is “dangerous.”

Racial disparities are not easy for Americans to confront, in large part because of a long-standing reluctance to talk about issues of race and ethnicity frankly and openly. Thus, this final article in the Discipline Disparities Series directly addresses our difficulties in addressing race when we confront racial disparities. This brief focuses on how our nation’s history has left us with ideas about “race” that still prompt exclusionary and disparate disciplinary practices and segregated, boundary experiences that make it difficult to confront racial issues, even as those issues continue to play out in our everyday interactions. The article concludes with recommendations for a race-conscious approach to intervention, as a way of beginning to frankly discuss and directly address racial disparities, including discipline disparities. If we are to undo the racial inequities that continue to plague us, we must find constructive ways to talk about them and intervene constructively and consciously to end them.

Part I: Why Is It So Difficult to Face Issues of Race?

An Old Issue: What History Left Us With

“Race” is a consequence of slavery and conquest. The racial groups we currently recognize are not based on substantive biological or genetic differences (American Association of Physical Anthropologists, 1996) but rather are social constructs that were created and reinforced across hundreds of years (Omi & Winant, 1994). In the United States, the origins of inequality began with the violence against and displacement of indigenous peoples and slavery. Many of the racial stereotypes that retain much of their power today in schools and society emerged from these systems of oppression (M. Alexander, 2010; Gabbidon, 1994; Miller, 1908; Muhammad, 2011; Scott, 1997). Over the course of subsequent centuries, Asian Americans, African Americans, Latina/os, and Native Americans were all judged by European settlers
and their descendants as inferior to Whites. Popular authors and scientists produced and circulated data purporting to demonstrate the inferiority of non-Europeans to reinforce those stereotypes (Gould, 1996). These corrosive stereotypes fueled unequal treatment and continue to do so even today. Although a number of social groups racialized as the “Other” have faced dehumanizing experiences, perhaps one of the most deeply entrenched—and the most pertinent to today’s discipline disparities, as well as the controversial killings across the nation headlining our media—is the corrosive stereotype of the dangerous Black male. We focus here specifically on the evolution of stereotypes linked to Black males for a number of reasons: first, because of the public salience of killings of Black men and youth over the last few years, and the ensuing outrage over their criminalization and dehumanization (conditions that we argue here are historically rooted). Second, because as other articles in our series have shown (see e.g., Skiba et al., 2014), Black males face the most glaring disproportionality in discipline in schools, compared with all other groups.

**Slavery and the notion of the dangerous Black male.** Like many of the racial stereotypes that remain embedded in our consciousness, the notion of the dangerous Black male grew directly out of slavery and its aftermath. Key to the institution of slavery was the need to “discipline” and control those enslaved. Slave codes enacted beginning in the 17th century made it illegal for slaves to congregate, marry, travel without their masters’ permission, or even learn to read (Finkelman, 1999). For Black slaves then, *any attempt to engage in normal human activity made one a criminal.*

The “dangerous Black man” stereotype, which framed Black men as aggressors and “sexual predators,” was seeded and spread as slaveholders reserved the most horrific punishments for Black men. For instance, out of fear of the slave revolts of the early 19th century, slaveholders spread the notion that runaway slaves were not escaping victims but dangerous criminals who would rape White women if they had the chance (Asante & Mattson, 1998). Although such incidents were rare or unheard of at that time, a law introduced in 1700 in Pennsylvania by William Penn mandated death or castration should a Black man attempt to rape a White woman (State of Pennsylvania, 1896); the mere fact of the legislation helped plant perceptions of the African American man as a potential danger. By the early 20th century, the stereotype of the dangerous Black predator had become deeply entrenched in the U.S. American psyche, endorsed by popular culture, politicians, and academics. Early movies such *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) cemented the image in the public mind, and President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed, in his 1906 State of the Union Address, that “The greatest existing cause of
lynching is the perpetration, especially by Black men, of the hideous crime of rape—the most abominable in all the category of crimes, even worse than murder . . . .” (Roosevelt, 1906). The founder and first president of the American Psychological Association, G. Stanley Hall (1905), argued that during slavery, hard work and fear were “potent restraints,” but with the end of slavery, . . . idleness, drink, and a new sense of equality have destroyed those restraints of imperious lust, which in some cases is reinforced by the thought of generations of abuse of his own women by White men upon whom he would turn the tables.

That fear in turn led to a cruel epidemic perpetrated on Black men: Between 1889 and 1918, more than 2,500 Blacks were lynched in the United States, primarily for minor grievances such as disputing with a White man, attempting to register to vote, asking a White woman’s hand in marriage, or peeping in a window (Black, 2003; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1919/1969). For Black women, the conditions were no better; slave owners often denigrated their bodies through rape, forced procreation or “breeding” with other slaves, and sold their children into slavery. Over time, other stereotypes emerged for Black women, who were frequently depicted as hypersexual, promiscuous, and less virtuous than White women.

Continuing inequality fueled by stereotypes. Long after slavery’s end, a racial worldview (Smedley & Smedley, 2012) stressing the inferiority of Blacks and other people of color supported continuing segregation, unequal opportunity, and the race-based hierarchy of Jim Crow, enforced by law, custom, and the terror of bombings and lynching. To escape outright oppression, Southern Blacks moved north in search of increased social and economic opportunity, yet still encountered attitudes and policies that reinforced segregation and stereotypes, and limited economic opportunity (Grossman, 1989; Wilkerson, 2011).

For nearly a century after the Civil War, laws and practices enforcing inferior schools for Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and Mexican Americans, and significantly better educational access, housing, and jobs for Whites led to economic and social cumulative advantage for Whites and growing disadvantage for people of color (Blank, 2005; Katznelson, 2006). Today, our nation’s academic and discipline gaps can be seen as our nation’s “educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006)—the direct results of compounded economic, social, and political inequalities that have plagued the United States for centuries.
The effects of stereotypes today. Stereotypes rooted in our national consciousness for centuries—including the “dangerous Black male” stereotype—continue to play themselves out today. TV and other media play a role in reinforcing such biases in our brains: The social action group *Color of Change* only recently succeeded in getting Fox to cancel primetime “Cops,” a program filling generations of minds with images of Black people spread-eagled or running from police. Stereotypes developed through these centuries of oppression and discrimination contribute to lowered expectations for many children of color’s academic abilities and potential (Ferguson, 1998; Tyson, 2011). Study findings have revealed that 58.9% of Black and White subjects endorsed at least one stereotypical view of difference in inborn ability (Plous & Williams, 1995). As recent research on implicit bias shows, those stereotypes are still widespread, perhaps the norm, in U.S. culture (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005). Research studies on implicit, even unconscious associations have found that U.S. study participants even associate Black faces with negative words such as “poison” or “cancer” (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Pertinent to both policing and school discipline, research shows that study participants often implicitly associate Blacks and apes, increasing participants’ endorsement of violence against Black suspects (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008).

In sum, negative, controlling images of the deviant Black person, developed over hundreds of years of discrimination and oppression, remain pervasive in America today. These stereotypes and beliefs have severe, sometimes deadly, consequences, and even more frequently create disruptions in the life chances of many Black and Brown youth.

Failure to Communicate: How Segregation and Social Boundaries Perpetuate Stereotypes

In the aftermath of World War II, when the landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) rejected the doctrine of separate but equal and demanded affirmative steps to overcome the handicaps created by legalized segregation (Kluger, 1976), social scientists theorized that increased contact among those of differing racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds would make it increasingly difficult to hold on to stereotypes, bias, and discrimination (Allport, 1954). They underestimated, however, the rigidity of mind-sets and stereotypical beliefs borne from social segregation.

More recent government practices, in conjunction with patterns in housing choice, have exacerbated and reinforced the segregation of our schools (Orfield, 2013). By the early 1970s, our courts began to limit or roll back
many of the principles that had guided post-Brown civil rights reform, refusing to act on anything but explicitly “de jure” segregation, releasing many school districts from any desegregation efforts, and eventually, outlawing much race-conscious desegregation effort. Both African American and Latino students attend schools that are on average composed of more than 60% students of color, while White students are the most segregated of all groups, attending on average schools that are 77% White (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Our segregated schools continue to reproduce the class patterns associated with race throughout our history: African American and Hispanic students are 3 times (35% and 34.5%, respectively) as likely as White students (12.5%) to be born into poverty, have less adequate access to health care, and tend to attend schools with inadequate physical facilities, and less highly qualified and trained teachers (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012). The resource drain of segregation exacerbates stress and frustration in segregated settings. Research also shows that the increased presence of “school resource officers” in such stressed, low-resource settings often increases the likelihood that young black people are not just suspended but ejected into the justice system through school arrest, particularly for subjective offenses such as disorderly conduct (Theriot, 2009).

Segregationist mind-sets spawned separatist government and private-sector policies that continue to define many of our communities today. In a recent report, economist Richard Rothstein (2014) thoroughly outlines how numerous government-sanctioned practices tolerated and encouraged the perpetuation of racial segregation, from neighborhood zoning rules separating Black and White communities to the development of isolated public housing projects; to federal subsidies for suburban development and neighborhood racial covenants excluding housing access to African Americans; to explicit real estate, insurance, and banking practices. Researchers have found that much of the wealth and economic inequality gaps existent today among African Americans, Latinos, and Whites can be traced back to segregationist, economic and social practices (Katznelson, 2006; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Rothstein, 2014).

Concurrently, severe resource deficits have plagued schools attended predominantly by low-income students of color. What educator Jonathan Kozol (1991) documented as “savage inequalities” across the nation range from finance inequities to meager resources such as dilapidated physical plants, inadequate reading and curricular materials for teaching and learning, and a disproportionate percentage of inexperienced teachers and an overrepresentation of school safety officers catalyzing police intervention—all amid school cultures often defined by low expectations and mistrust.
Because physical separation across schools and districts by race and class remains the norm, the structure of relationships between groups in our society remains largely segregated, lessening the opportunities not only for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to have the same access to high-quality schools but also for groups to interact and have their stereotypes of one another challenged. Our experiences in schools are not just segregated physically but also boundaried socially (Carter, 2012). That is, physical and psychological separation by race creates very real boundaries in lived experience that make us unable to learn from and understand each other. Segregation does not just compound economic inequality, with more wealthy and more White students in schools or classes with more opportunity and less wealthy students of color in underresourced, understaffed schools. Despite the end of legal sanctions upholding strict segregation, there has not yet been a real and functional integration in schools and society. The absence of a truly integrated society (Powell, 2005)—a society in which we live together and as equals—has left us as a nation unable to learn from one another, to surmount old stereotypes, and to communicate and to act effectively on the eradication of inequalities that run rampant in our schools and society. Indeed, in schooling as in policing, adults and youth interact across race lines more than people in many other careers, while in many cases being underprepared to do so.

Even in the face of rapidly increasing diversity in our nation’s student population, the majority of U.S teachers remain female, White, and middle class (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012), creating a within-school boundary in itself. Many students in pre-service education programs enter with little previous contact with racial groups other than their own (Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, & Flowers, 2003); unless pervasive negative stereotypes are explicitly engaged and challenged, educators can carry these common stereotypes with them into schools (Terrill & Mark, 2000).

Nor are White teachers the only bearers of stereotypes. Middle-class teachers of color are no less likely to evaluate students subjectively than their White middle-class counterparts, while Black and White teachers of working class backgrounds are less likely to evaluate their racial and ethnic minority and poor students negatively (K. L. Alexander, Entwisle, & Thompson, 1987). These findings point to the complex dynamics of race and class: Controlling images and narratives about different groups of individuals can affect us all across racial lines.

In sum, 60 years after Brown, we remain surprisingly segregated as a society, and the boundaries between the experiences of those of different heritages remain. The benefits foreseen by integration—that increased contact would lead to the gradual fading of bias and stereotypes—have occurred far less than expected. Combine still-pervasive stereotypes with vastly separate
experiences for students and teachers of different races, and we can see why it is extremely difficult to come together and honestly talk about the racial and ethnic stereotypes and inequalities that still afflict our schools and society—and that shape our school discipline patterns.

**Race Still Matters: How Old Patterns Continue Today**

As a result of our boundaried experiences and the widespread tendency to avoid the charged topic of race whenever possible, there is insufficient opportunity to reach out across those lines of social division and examine the causes of deep-seated inequalities in education in the United States, including disparities in suspension, expulsion, and school arrest. Our continued separation influences the way in which we interact around race, including the ways in which teachers and administrators interact with students. In this section, we turn to a rapidly growing body of evidence finding that, however much we would rather not talk about it, issues of race and difference continue to be embedded in our schools and society, continuing to reinforce and replicate inequality in society, in education, and in school discipline.

**Implicit bias.** As outlined earlier, implicit biases are deep-seated attitudes that operate outside conscious awareness—that may even be in direct conflict with a person’s stated beliefs and values. Implicit bias around the topic of race was first explored by Banaji and her colleagues (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), through the development of the Implicit Association Test (IAT), created in 1994 by researcher Anthony Greenwald (Greenwald et al., 1998). Numerous studies about race using the IAT find that both White and Black participants pair White faces or White-sounding names with positive words. Both types of participant also pair Black faces or stereotypically Black names with negative words much faster than when pairing White faces/names with negative results or than when pairing Black faces/names with positive words (Nosek et al., 2005). Today, brains still “hold” old biases and preferences for various groups (positive or negative); such associations are mostly involuntary (Cunningham, Nezlek, & Banaji, 2004).

Implicit biases do not necessarily lead to explicitly biased decisions or behaviors in schools, but they can undergird discriminatory behaviors—especially when such biases remain unstated and unexamined. In the school discipline realm, some research suggests that White and Black students may receive differential treatment in terms of opportunities to participate in learning settings, or different teacher reactions to misbehavior (Casteel, 1998; Simpson & Erikson, 1983). At the office level, harsher punishment of students of color for the same or similar behavior has been documented in a
number of studies (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; R. J. Skiba et al., 2011). Finally, recent research has shown that schools with a higher proportion of Black students are more likely to use a range of more punitive consequences, including suspension, expulsion, arrests, and zero tolerance (Welch & Payne, 2010; the increasing presence of police officers on school staff exacerbates potential punitive responses. Because these patterns have been found to occur regardless of school demographics or the severity of student behavior, it becomes increasingly difficult to rule out the possibility of some form of bias as a contributing factor.

Fortunately, emerging research suggests that it is possible to recognize implicit bias in oneself and learn techniques to overcome such perceptions and increase positive social interactions. Police trainings are tackling implicit bias (Fridell & Laszlo, 2009), and so are interventions in schools. Professor Patricia Devine, for example, developed a “multi-faceted prejudice habit-breaking” intervention that taught participants five different de-biasing strategies. Significant reductions in implicit bias among those trained provide tangible evidence that a controlled intervention can produce persistent reductions in implicit bias (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012).

**Microaggressions.** Microaggressions—everyday exchanges, usually brief, that deliver demeaning messages or subtle reminders about racial stereotypes (Sue, 2010)—remain one key way that unconscious stereotypes or implicit biases are enacted in daily interactions. Microaggressions are often enacted automatically and unconsciously—delivered in the form of subtle insults, indifferent looks, gestures, and tones. Such actions are often difficult to identify, whether they are verbal, nonverbal, visual, or behavioral (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Outside schools, “microaggressions” can look like a waiter serving a White patron before someone of color; in schools, microaggressions can be acts that convey underlying (even if unconscious) messages that people of color are less intelligent, more dangerous, or otherwise inferior. Sometimes, everyday “microaggressions” are moments when we ignore, negate, or dismiss others’ experiences of harm (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Sue et al., 2007; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). In the disciplinary realm, “microaggressions” can take shape in sudden over-reactions to young people of color as threatening.

“**Maybe we shouldn’t talk about it.**” Despite the need to attend carefully to everyday interactions with students, pre-service and in-service teachers often resist discussing racial topics related to education and to discipline specifically. The difficulty that educators, especially White educators, have in openly talking about race and racism has been well documented (Bryan,
Wilson, Lewis, & Wills, 2012; Castagno, 2008; Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998; King, 1991; Nieto & McDonough, 2011; Pollock, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2005; R. J. Skiba et al., 2006; Sleeter, 2001; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Furthermore, many scripts shape our talk when we do talk about race—we often explain race issues in predictably reductive ways (Pollock, 2016). Thus, discussing our race talk habits head on is a crucial part of discussing race disparities in education.

A colorblind perspective suggests that maybe we should not talk about it—that discussions about race are extraneous, or that those seeking to discuss race in, for example, school discipline are “playing the race card” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). A commitment to a colorblind philosophy may also be associated with the belief that U.S. society is in a “post-racial” era where any racial disparities are due simply to characteristics or behaviors of the affected groups themselves (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; King, 1991). Yet, professor of law Neil Gotanda (1991) has suggested that a colorblind stance is self-contradictory: Asserting that one does not “see color” actually requires considering race in society before rejecting its relevance.

Can We Address Racial Disparities Without Addressing Race?
The Failure of Race Neutrality

In recent years, national policy on education issues has replaced active, affirmative, race-conscious remedies with race-neutral ones. In case after case, the Supreme Court has rolled back efforts to consider race in school assignment in K-12 schools. The evidence suggests, however, that race-neutral approaches to diversifying schools, such as income-based school assignment, are not effective in reducing segregation: In fact, such “race neutral” solutions can lead to increased school segregation (McDermott, Furstenbeg & Diem 2015; Gullen, 2012; Reardon, Yun, and Kurleander 2006).

Nor is there evidence that race-neutral approaches have been effective in reducing racial/ethnic disparities in school discipline. For example, the approach of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been found to be successful in general in reducing office disciplinary referrals (Bohanon et al., 2006), decreasing rates of school suspension (Horner et al., 2009), improving school climate (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009), and to a certain extent even contributing to improved academic outcomes (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). Yet, researcher Claudia Vincent and colleagues have demonstrated that without specific attention to issues of race and culture, implementation of PBIS has not always successfully reduced racial/ethnic disparities in office referrals and suspension (Vincent, Sprague, & Gau, 2015; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Together, these data suggest that to
successfully address racial disparities in discipline, we must acknowledge and work through issues of race.

Part II: What Should We Do? Bringing Race Into Conversations About Disparities

Talking about racial discipline patterns in schools is not easy, because it involves talking about the full range of race, racism, and racial inequality issues in American life (Carter, 2012; Morris, 2005; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Tatum, 2007). We have yet to have the national conversation on race urged by President Obama in his 2013 speech on the topic, precisely because having that conversation requires us to grapple with the harms, consequences, and continuing shape of racism, discrimination, and inequality woven into the very foundation of U.S. history. Such a conversation also requires us to consider how to counteract racial inequality and unequal resource allocations not only through policy but also through our own everyday practices and interactions.

In schools (as in policing and elsewhere in society), such conversations are especially challenging, as they force educators to reflect on their own views of and interactions with students. Beverly Tatum (1997) argues that many Whites are reluctant to talk openly about race for fear that their comments will be misinterpreted, generating anger and rejection from people of color. Even considering the possibility of racial dynamics in our disciplinary interactions can be highly threatening: Do data showing racial disparities expose me or my school as “racist” (Trepagnier, 2006)? Although school staff members may resist public decisions about race, they may continue to struggle in private with a variety of race-based questions, tensions, and dilemmas in the wake of racialized interactions with students and colleagues (Buehler, 2013).

Yet, addressing racial disparities requires addressing race. Imagine a school district with consistently low reading achievement scores; yet within that district, an unwritten code prevented staff from explicitly discussing the topic of reading. Obviously, the failure to address the central problem would guarantee that reading deficits would persist over time. In the same way, when we do not discuss and then address the racial dynamics of our racially disproportionate discipline, racial disparities in discipline continue to worsen over time (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Pollock (2004) has referred to race talk resistance as a complicated “colormuteness.” Although some clumsy or incomplete race talk can in fact create harm (see below), our reticence to talk frankly about issues of race prevents us from even considering the steps we need to take to fix racial discipline disparities.

The goal is not just to talk “more” about racial patterns in discipline; rather, the goal is to discuss those patterns more thoroughly and then to
ultimately eradicate them (Pollock, 2016). A conversation about race and discipline means talking about what we think automatically about “types of children,” even if those thoughts are undesired; who we react to with fear or harshness; and who needs more care inside our school buildings (Carter, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Fine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2010; Singleton, 2012; Sleeter, 2001, 2009; Tatum, 2007). It also means asking hard questions about whether opportunities to learn and to be included in learning opportunities are equally or sufficiently distributed in schools. Particularly important to an “antiracist” approach to discipline is to talk more thoroughly about any given incident of discipline (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014) and to ask reflectively, does this act of discipline provide access to opportunity, or shut off such access (Noguera, 2008)? Another key approach is to react compassionately, calmly, and without escalation to every young person’s interaction with a peer or teacher.

What follow are practical descriptions of approaches and strategies that can be used in schools and classrooms to acknowledge and address issues of racial inequality. The goal is not simply to talk about race, but rather to (a) identify the extent of racial/ethnic disparities through examination of the data, (b) be willing to discuss those disparities and their causes thoroughly, (c) develop interventions that include a race-conscious analysis of the causes of those disparities, and (d) monitor the effectiveness of our interventions through continued examination of disaggregated data.

**Identify and Acknowledge the Extent of Disciplinary Disparities Through Examination of the Data**

Administrators and educators can open conversations on racial inequality by examining actual data at the school, district, state, and federal levels. Relying on school data to examine disparities based on race/ethnicity, as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability status, provides teachers and administrators the opportunity to engage in honest discussions about why some groups of students are faring worse in discipline outcomes. In some cases, analyzing achievement outcomes simultaneously with disciplinary outcomes might be essential, as disciplinary incidents can arise in classrooms where students and teachers are having frustrated interactions over academics. Educators and their supporters can,

- Examine out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and school arrest data, as well as classroom disciplinary referral data, to ask what student groups seem to be disciplined disproportionately and to what extent
decisions by school personnel play a role (Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014).

- Monitor and hold schools and districts accountable for racial/ethnic disparities in opportunities and resources for students, to remedy any unequal patterns in academic preparation and achievement that can exacerbate negative student–teacher interactions (Losen et al., 2014).
- Increase understanding and provide deep professional development for teachers and principals around issues of racial disparities, exclusions, and differences.

**Engage in Conversations About Race**

Once disaggregated data are available, they must be interpreted. Schools will make the most progress if data open a door to reflective and critical conversations about the ways in which school processes, adult actions, and adult interactions with students may contribute to disciplinary outcomes. Sustaining a critical conversation about race patterns means asking questions about the full set of interactions that produce discipline patterns; about how race factors in to how adults react to students and how students then react to adults; about which false or harmful notions about “races” we carry around with us as we interact; and even when and how thinking of other human beings in terms of race is helpful.

To set the context for thorough analysis before dialoguing about specific disciplinary incidents, school leaders can encourage reading and dialogue about the issues raised in the first half of this brief, including:

- The history of false notions about “groups,” including the contemporary forms of old ideas and stereotypes.
- The national history of racial disparities in education opportunity, and the variety of factors that contribute to any contemporary lack of opportunities in the school’s local setting.
- The distribution of resources in the school’s academic and/or social environment.

Then, leaders can support a thorough conversation about specific disciplinary incidents and habits of discipline at the school, including discussions of

- How interests are served/not served, and whose needs are met/not met, by different disciplinary practices at the school (e.g., an out of school suspension; a “time out”; Noguera, 2008).
  - Students’ and educators’ actual experiences with specific incidents of school discipline.
Leaders can support teachers in considering the pros and cons of specific disciplinary interactions, for students as well as for teachers (Howard, 2010).

- Leaders also can support teachers to reflect on the experiences and pervasive ideas that have shaped their “gut perceptions” of students.
- Finally, leaders can support educators to reflect on ways to create a culturally flexible school where both teachers and students can interact “across numerous social and cultural boundaries” (Carter, 2012).

Facilitating Discussions About Race and Discipline With Both Colleagues and Students

Educators preparing to create a dialogue with colleagues about issues of race and discipline can find many tips for dialogue in the work of researchers (Au, 2011; Banks, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Nieto, 2000; Pollock, 2004, 2016; Singleton, 2012; Sleeter, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wallace & Brand, 2012; Ware, 2006; Watt, 2007), with the goal of supporting colleagues to hear information, analyze causes, and design solutions. Without proper preparation, facilitators may themselves minimize individual experiences, reinforce stereotypes, or find themselves unable to handle the range of conflicting and sometimes strong opinions and emotions that may arise.

“Clumsy race talk” (Pollock, 2016) can also result in repeated stereotyping of students from particular groups, if speakers (a) simply repeat stereotypes about students rather than challenge them, or (b) repeat scripted analyses that students alone are responsible for disciplinary problems, even when every discipline interaction involves an interaction between adults and students. To avoid repeating such “scripts” in talk about discipline, teachers can talk through actual interactions with students that seemed to “snowball” (Pollock, 2016) into a discipline problem. University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) educational researcher Tyrone Howard (2012) has shown that having teachers watch videos of their interactions with youth can help them unpack disciplinary incidents more thoroughly: Educators can unpack how small interactions grow into dire disciplinary consequences.

To talk openly about race and why racial disparities occur, we must create safe spaces for school personnel. School principals and administrators can support colleagues to openly discuss the full range of dynamics under specific discipline incidents, opportunity provision in the school, and student–teacher relationships generally (Luttrell, 2008). Educators need space to think through and dialogue about their own reactions to students; in addition, research shows that restorative justice approaches can support students to
think through their own interactions to teachers (Wadhwa, 2016). In engaging colleagues and even youth in dialogue, school leaders can:

- Model a willingness to ask questions.
- Acknowledge that mistakes will be made when speaking about race (Tatum, 2007).
- Acknowledge that participants will experience discomfort while considering and discussing experiences/perspectives different from one’s own (Singleton, 2012).
- Model commitment on the part of all participants to being part of the analyses of problems and solutions, given that any discipline issue involves an interaction between students and adults (Pollock, 2004).
- Grasp “race teachable moments” (Border Crossers, 2011) and seize the opportunities when students’ comments, questions, and classroom incidents or students’ preoccupations about race and/or racism can sustain critical conversations about inequities. These spontaneous conversations can be complemented by formal activities that allow students to share about their families and identities.

**Crafting Race-Conscious Intervention and Evaluation**

Addressing the race aspect of racial discipline disparities requires more than thorough dialogue about why disparities occur. To remedy disparities, educators must design specific strategies for improving student–teacher relationships, and preventing and handling conflict. To support such work, leaders in the field have recommended a host of overall strategies, including efforts to improve the cultural responsiveness of instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Nieto, 2010) and classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Efforts to increase academic rigor and to increase safe, predictable environments for young people have also been shown overall to reduce the conflicts that balloon into discipline cases (Gregory et al., 2014). Case studies have shown that specific attention to cultural responsiveness—that is, connecting respectfully to students’ lives—is beneficial for classroom process and student outcome (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010).

Educators also can seek more specific strategies and interventions to reduce racial discipline disparities. A previous brief in this series, specifically addressing intervention (Gregory et al., 2014), acknowledged that although we need to know a great deal more about how to intervene specifically to close the discipline gap, promising interventions are emerging. That brief identified a number of interventions and principles for reducing disparities in discipline:
• **Supportive relationships.** Programs that improve interactions between teachers and students such as My Teaching Partner (Gregory et al., 2014) have been shown to both reduce the incidence of disciplinary removal and close the racial/ethnic discipline gap.

• **Academic rigor.** High level and engaging instruction, combined with support for meeting high expectations, has been shown to turn around achievement even in highly disrupted school settings (Mehan, 2012).

• **Culturally relevant and responsive instruction.** Teachers can create safe and respectful classroom environments through materials, events, and teaching that reflect the diversity of their classrooms and community (Au, 2011; Banks, 1995; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Nieto, 2000; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

• **Bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments.** Analyzing disaggregated data can allow school teams to determine whether different groups of students receive different penalties for the same infraction. Teachers can avoid the trap of differential treatments by replacing snap judgments about discipline with time to reflect on the nature of the interaction.

• **Use problem-solving approaches to discipline.** Restorative practices train staff in structured problem solving to identify contributors to conflict, offering a promising approach for reducing the discipline gap (Gonzalez, 2015).

• **Recognizing student and family voice.** The experiences of community organizations such as Denver’s Padres y Jovenes Unidos (Freeman, 2014) have shown that schools with issues of disproportionate discipline benefit greatly from reaching out to parents and students to understand their concerns.

• **Reintegrating students after conflict.** After long-term absences due to suspension, expulsion, or detention, “transition centers,” involving collaboration between probation, mental health, child welfare, and school districts, can assist in the successful transition of excluded youth back into school.

It is unclear whether interventions must be tailored to specific racial/ethnic or cultural populations to have an impact on student outcomes (Kauffman, Conroy, Gardner, & Oswald, 2008). However, closing racial discipline gaps will almost certainly require interventions and programs that are in some way race-conscious—that is, conscious of overall race dynamics in student–educator relationship and interaction.

At the same time, we cannot assume that any specific intervention or program, however effective it may appear to be in general, will reduce racial and
ethnic disparities until we specifically test and measure the effect of that program on such disparities. To know whether any intervention or strategy is effective in closing racial gaps, then, evaluating its effects specifically on racial/ethnic disparities is key. As part of any new program, educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to reduce racial inequity will need to answer the following question: What is the evidence that our efforts have specifically reduced race and ethnic disparities in discipline?

**Does a Race-Conscious Approach Make A Difference?**

Talking about race is linked to improved outcomes when it is tied to actual school reforms and practices focused on achieving equity in schools. In Tyrone Howard’s (2010) study of four schools successful in closing racial achievement gaps, he identifies five attributes commonly found across the schools that were fundamental in each of the school’s ability to produce high achievers in challenging circumstances. One of these attributes was explicitly acknowledging race, racism, and its perceived influence in learning. The other attributes included visionary leadership, effective instructional practice, intensive academic intervention, and parental and community engagement. More research and interventions utilizing race- and culture-conscious approaches are needed to fully explore the potential of such interventions.

**Conclusion**

Regardless of our attempts to avoid the topic, the issue of race emerges over and over again, permeating our society and conditioning our lives. For Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and many other African American males, the translation of racialized thinking into action yielded deadly consequences. For many others in our nation, the consequences of our heritage of presumed racial difference and long-standing segregation play themselves out on a daily basis, through lowered expectations, decreased educational opportunity, and disciplinary overreaction. This is an old problem. Corrosive stereotypes—such as the dangerous Black male—rooted themselves deep in our nation’s psyche and, whether or not they reach our consciousness, remain entwined in our thinking and our practices today. Throughout much of our history, the structures of slavery, Jim Crow, and other forms of racial exclusion were purposely intended to maintain deep divisions between us, to the advantage of some groups and the detriment of others.

Even as we celebrate anniversaries of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the civil rights movement challenging the legal framework of segregation
and division, judicial rulings and federal policy have reversed that early
momentum, maintaining and reinforcing structural inequality and boundaries
of race and class. Although based on social understandings rather than bio-
logical realities, perceptions of racial difference continue to determine who
has opportunity and privilege, and who does not. At the same time, the ben-
efits of integration foreseen by its advocates—that increased contact would
lead to increased understanding, empathy, and ultimately equality—have not
occurred, simply because there has not yet been real integration in American
society. Today in schools, our interactions across racial lines yield differential
outcomes in school discipline, with devastating consequences for the young
people served.

The topic of racial disparities understandably remains emotionally
charged. As in a family that can never discuss its fundamental secrets, our
deeply held and often unconscious beliefs, stereotypes, and biases are too
rarely brought to the surface, examined, and finally expunged. Yet, as much
as we seek to lock them from view, race and racism continue to color our
interactions, including our disciplinary actions, on a daily, even moment-by-

momen basis.

The goal, however, is not simply to talk more about race, or racial dispari-
ties in school discipline. We acknowledge that the problems of race and rac-
ism require not only school-level changes in conversations and practices but
also systemic changes throughout many social institutions in our society,
from the economy to the political, judicial, and justice systems. Conducted
clumsily, conversations about race can increase resistance to facing and
addressing the problems that plague us. Even when critical and meaningful
dialogues create insights, there is no guarantee that those insights will be
brought back into schools and classrooms to create practical differences in
treatment. To be effective in truly addressing racial disparities, our conver-
sations about race must be a part of a process in which we (a) examine disag-
gregated data to determine where racial/ethnic differences occur, (b)
thoughly discuss the contexts and interactions creating those data, (c) craft
interventions to erase those disparities, and (d) follow through to ensure that
we have truly made a difference, by monitoring the disaggregated data to
evaluate the impact of our actions. Ultimately, as has been noted in other
articles in this series, achieving racial equity in school discipline requires
action, leadership, and a commitment to counteract old habits and stereo-
types. The roots of racial inequality in our schools and our society are many
centuries deep. Eliminating disciplinary disparities, or for that matter any
inequity in our educational system, will require an ongoing awareness of how
those disparities are produced and a steadfast commitment to finally bringing
them to an end.
Authors’ Note
This article was originally published as part of the Discipline Disparities Briefing Paper series developed by the Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative. The Collaborative, a group of 26 nationally known researchers, educators, advocates, and policy analysts, came together over a period of 3 years, examining the research and meeting with stakeholders to address the problem of disciplinary disparities. For further information, see the Discipline Disparities Collaborative website at rtpcollaborative.indiana.edu.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The authors gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Discipline Disparities Collaborative by Atlantic Philanthropies and the Open Society Foundations.

Notes
1. For further exploration of this history, see Carter (2012); Pollock (2016); R. Skiba (2012). For a comprehensive teachers’ guide and curriculum addressing the historical issues presented in this brief, as well as classroom strategies for discussing racism and racial inequality, see Teaching Tolerance, the New Press, Alexander, and Coke (2014).
2. Defined as segregation that results from intentional state action.
3. In Keyes v. School District (1973), the Court backed away from the implication that the racial separation of Blacks was the basis of the constitutional violation of segregated schools, ruling that if racially separate schools were not the result of racially motivated decision making, such an adverse result for the Black schoolchildren did not meet the definition of unconstitutional segregation. In its 2007 decision in Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 (PICS) 551 U.S. 701, 782 (2007, Kennedy, J. Concurring in Part, Concurring in Judgment), the Supreme Court rejected the ability of public schools in Seattle and Louisville to use individual racial classifications to pursue integrated schools.
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Understanding Implicit Bias
What Educators Should Know

BY CHERYL STAATS

As a profession, teaching is full of well-intentioned individuals deeply committed to seeing all children succeed. Touching innumerable lives in direct and indirect ways, educators uniquely recognize that our future rests on the shoulders of young people and that investing in their education, health, and overall well-being benefits society as a whole, both now and into the future.

This unwavering desire to ensure the best for children is precisely why educators should become aware of the concept of implicit bias: the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Operating outside of our conscious awareness, implicit biases are pervasive, and they can challenge even the most well-intentioned and egalitarian-minded individuals, resulting in actions and outcomes that do not necessarily align with explicit intentions.

In this article, I seek to shed light on the dynamics of implicit bias with an eye toward educators. After introducing the concept and the science undergirding it, I focus on its implications for educators and suggest ways they can mitigate its effects.

The Unconscious Mind

Psychologists estimate that our brains are capable of processing approximately 11 million bits of information every second.\(^1\) Given the tremendous amount of information that inundates this startlingly complex organ in any given moment, many researchers have sought to understand the nuances of our remarkable cognitive functioning. In his 2011 tome on cognition, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman articulates a widely accepted framework for understanding human cognitive functioning by delineating our mental processing into two parts: System 1 and System 2.\(^2\)

System 1 handles cognition that occurs outside of conscious awareness. This system operates automatically and extremely fast. For example, let’s say you stop your car at a red light. When the light turns green, you know to proceed through the intersection. Thanks to the speed and efficiency of System 1, experienced

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This unwavering desire to ensure the best for children is precisely why educators should become aware of the concept of implicit bias.

of the mental associations that affect how we perceive and act are operating implicitly (i.e., unconsciously). As such, System 1 is responsible for the associations known as implicit biases.

Because the implicit associations we hold arise outside of conscious awareness, implicit biases do not necessarily align with our explicit beliefs and stated intentions. This means that even individuals who profess egalitarian intentions and try to treat all individuals fairly can still unknowingly act in ways that reflect their implicit—rather than their explicit—biases. Thus, even well-intentioned individuals can act in ways that produce inequitable outcomes for different groups.

Moreover, because implicit biases are unconscious and involuntarily activated as part of System 1, we are not even aware that they exist, yet they can have a tremendous impact on decision making. A large body of social science evidence has shown that implicit biases can be activated by any number of various identities we perceive in others, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or age. Since these robust associations are a critical component of our System 1 processing, everyone has implicit biases, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or age. No one is immune. Consequently, the range of implicit bias implications for individuals in a wide range of professions—not just education—is vast. For example, researchers have documented implicit biases in healthcare professionals, law enforcement officers, and even individuals whose careers require avowed commitments to impartiality, such as judges. Indeed, educators are also susceptible to the influence of these unconscious biases.

Implicit Bias in Education

Research on implicit bias has identified several conditions in which individuals are most likely to rely on their unconscious System 1 associations. These include situations that involve ambiguous or incomplete information; the presence of time constraints; and circumstances in which our cognitive control may be compromised, such as through fatigue or having a lot on our minds. Given that teachers encounter many, if not all, of these conditions through the course of a school day, it is unsurprising that implicit biases may be contributing to teachers’ actions and decisions.

Let’s consider a few examples in the context of school discipline.

First, classifying behavior as good or bad and then assigning a consequence is not a simple matter. All too often, behavior is in the eye of the beholder. Many of the infractions for which students are disciplined have a subjective component, meaning that the situation is a bit ambiguous. Thus, how an educator interprets a situation can affect whether the behavior merits discipline, and if so, to what extent.

Infractions such as “disruptive behavior,” “disrespect,” and “excessive noise,” for example, are ambiguous and dependent on context, yet they are frequently provided as reasons for student discipline. That is not to say that some form of discipline is unwarranted in these situations, or that all disciplinary circumstances are subjective, as certainly many have objective components. However, these subjective infractions constitute a very large portion of disciplinary incidents.

There are no standardized ways of assessing many infractions, such as disobedient or disruptive behavior, though schools do attempt to delineate some parameters through codes of conduct and by outlining associated consequences. Yet subjectivity can still come into play. Teachers’ experiences and automatic unconscious associations can shape their interpretation of situations that merit discipline, and can even contribute to discipline disparities based on a student’s race.
One study of discipline disparities found that students of color were more likely to be sent to the office and face other disciplinary measures for offenses such as disrespect or excessive noise, which are subjective, while white students were more likely to be sent to the office for objective infractions, such as smoking or vandalism. (For more about discipline disparities, see the article on page 4.) Thus, in disciplinary situations that are a bit ambiguous (What qualifies as disrespect? How loud is too loud?), educators should be aware that their implicit associations may be contributing to their decisions without their conscious awareness or consent.

Second, implicit attitudes toward specific racial groups can unconsciously affect disciplinary decisions. For example, extensive research has documented pervasive implicit associations that link African Americans, particularly males, to stereotypes such as aggression, criminality, or danger, even when explicit beliefs contradict these views. In education, these implicit associations can taint perceptions of the discipline severity required to ensure that the misbehaving student understands what he or she did wrong. In short, these unconscious associations can mean the difference between one student receiving a warning for a confrontation and another student being sent to school security personnel. In the words of researcher Carla R. Monroe, “Many teachers may not explicitly connect their disciplinary reactions to negative perceptions of Black males, yet systematic trends in disproportionality suggest that teachers may be implicitly guided by stereotypical perceptions that African American boys require greater control than their peers and are unlikely to respond to nonpunitive measures.”

A recent study from Stanford University sheds further light on this dynamic by highlighting how racial disparities in discipline can occur even when black and white students behave similarly. In the experiment, researchers showed a racially diverse group of female K–12 teachers the school records of a fictitious middle school student who had misbehaved twice; both infractions were minor and unrelated. Requesting that the teachers imagine working at this school, researchers asked a range of questions related to how teachers perceived and would imagine working at this school. Relevant parallels also exist for K–12 teachers evaluating their students’ work.

A 2014 study explored how confirmation bias can unconsciously taint the evaluation of work that employees produce. Researchers created a fictitious legal memo that contained 22 different, deliberately planted errors. These errors included minor spelling and grammatical errors, as well as factual, analytical, and technical writing errors. The exact same memo was distributed to law firm partners under the guise of a “writing analysis study,” and they were asked to edit and evaluate the memo.

Many of the infractions for which students are disciplined have a subjective component.

Half of the memos listed the author as African American while the remaining portion listed the author as Caucasian. Findings indicated that memo evaluations hinged on the perceived race of the author. When the author was listed as African American, the evaluators found more of the embedded errors and rated the memo as lower quality than those who believed the author was Caucasian. Researchers concluded that these findings suggest unconscious confirmation bias; despite the intention to be unbiased, “we see more errors when we expect to see errors, and we see fewer errors when we do not expect to see errors.”

While this study focused on the evaluation of a legal memo, it is not a stretch of the imagination to consider the activation of this implicit dynamic in grading student essays or evaluating other forms of subjective student performance. Confirmation bias represents yet another way in which implicit biases can challenge the best of explicit intentions.

Finally, implicit biases can also shape teacher expectations of student achievement. For example, a 2010 study examined teachers’ implicit and explicit ethnic biases, finding that their implicit—not explicit—biases were responsible for different expectations of achievement for students from different ethnic backgrounds.

While these examples are a select few among many, together they provide a glimpse into how implicit biases can have detrimental effects for students, regardless of teachers’ explicit goals. This raises the question: How can we better align our implicit biases with the explicit values we uphold?
Mitigating the Influence of Implicit Bias

Recognizing that implicit biases can yield inequitable outcomes even among well-intentioned individuals, a significant portion of implicit bias research has explored how individuals can change their implicit associations—in effect “reprogramming” their mental associations so that unconscious biases better align with explicit convictions. Thanks to the malleable nature of our brains, researchers have identified a few approaches that, often with time and repetition, can help inhibit preexisting implicit biases in favor of more egalitarian alternatives.

With implicit biases operating outside of our conscious awareness and inaccessible through introspection, at first glance it might seem difficult to identify any that we may hold. Fortunately, researchers have identified several approaches for assessing these unconscious associations, one of which is the Implicit Association Test. Debuting in 1998, this free online test measures the relative strength of associations between pairs of concepts. Designed to tap into unconscious System 1 associations, the IAT is a response latency (i.e., reaction time) measure that assesses implicit associations through this key idea: when two concepts are highly associated, test takers will be faster at pairing those concepts (and make fewer mistakes doing so) than they will when two concepts are not as highly associated.*

To illustrate, consider this example. Most people find the task of pairing flower types (e.g., orchid, daffodil, tulip) with positive words (e.g., pleasure, happy, cheer) easier than they do pairing flower types with negative words (e.g., rotten, ugly, filth). Because flowers typically have a positive connotation, people can quickly link flowers to positive terms and make few mistakes in doing so. In contrast, words such as types of insects (e.g., ants, cockroaches, mosquitoes) are likely to be easier for most people to pair with those negative terms than with positive ones.17

While this example is admittedly simplistic, these ideas laid the foundation for versions of the IAT that assess more complex social issues, such as race, gender, age, and sexual orientation, among others. Millions of people have taken the IAT, and extensive research has largely upheld the IAT as a valid and reliable measure of implicit associations. There are IATs that assess both attitudes (i.e., positive or negative emotions toward various groups) and stereotypes (i.e., how quickly someone can connect a group to relevant stereotypes about that group at an implicit level).

Educators can begin to address their implicit biases by taking the Implicit Association Test. Doing so will enable them to become consciously aware of some of the unconscious associations they may harbor. Research suggests that this conscious awareness of one’s own implicit biases is a critical first step for counteracting their influence. This awareness is especially crucial for educators to help ensure that their explicit intentions to help students learn and reach their full potential are not unintentionally thwarted by implicit biases.

By identifying any discrepancies that may exist between conscious ideals and automatic implicit associations, individuals can take steps to bring those two into better alignment. One approach for changing implicit associations identified by researchers is intergroup contact: meaningfully engaging with individuals whose identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion) differ from your own. Certain conditions exist for optimal effects, such as equal status within the situation, a cooperative setting, and working toward common goals.20 By getting to know people who differ from you on a real, personal level, you can begin to build new associations about the groups those individuals represent and break down existing implicit associations.21

Another approach that research has determined may help change implicit associations is exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars: individuals who contradict widely held stereotypes. Some studies have shown that exposure to these exemplars may help individuals begin to automatically override their preexisting biases.22 Examples of counter-stereotypical exemplars may include male nurses, female scientists, African American judges, and others who defy stereotypes.

This approach for challenging biases is valuable not just for educators but also for the students they teach, as some scholars suggest that photographs and décor that expose individuals to counter-stereotypical exemplars can activate new mental associations.23 While implicit associations may not change immediately, using counter-stereotypical images for classroom posters and other visuals may serve this purpose.

Beyond changing cognitive associations, another strategy for mitigating implicit biases that relates directly to school discipline is data collection. Because implicit biases function outside of conscious awareness, identifying their influence can be challenging. Gathering meaningful data can bring to light trends and patterns in disparate treatment of individuals and throughout an institution that may otherwise go unnoticed.

In the context of school discipline, relevant data may include the student’s grade, the perceived infraction, the time of day it occurred, the name(s) of referring staff, and other relevant details and objective information related to the resulting disciplinary consequence. Information like this can facilitate a large-scale review of discipline measures and patterns and whether any connections to implicit biases may emerge. Moreover, tracking discipline data over time and keeping implicit bias in mind can help create a school- or districtwide culture of accountability.

Finally, in the classroom, educators taking enough time to carefully process a situation before making a decision can minimize implicit bias. Doing so, of course, is easier said than done, given that educators are constantly pressed for time, face myriad challenges, and need crucial support from administrators to effectively manage student behavior.

As noted earlier, System 1 unconscious associations operate extremely quickly. As a result, in circumstances where individuals face time constraints or have a lot on their minds, their brains tend to rely on those fast and automatic implicit associations. Research suggests that reducing cognitive load and allowing more time to process information can lead to less biased decision making. In terms of school discipline, this can mean allowing educators time to reflect on the disciplinary situation at hand rather than make a hasty decision.

While implicit biases can affect any moment of decision making, these unconscious associations should not be regarded as character flaws or other indicators of whether someone is a “good person” or not. Having the ability to use our System 1 cognition to make effortless, lightning-fast associations, such as knowing that a green traffic light means go, is crucial to our cognition.

Rather, when we identify and reflect on the implicit biases we hold, we recognize that our life experiences may unconsciously shape our perceptions of others in ways that we may or may not consciously desire, and if the latter, we can take action to mitigate the influence of those associations.

In light of the compelling body of implicit bias scholarship, teachers, administrators, and even policymakers are increasingly considering the role of unconscious bias in disciplinary situations. For example, the federal school discipline guidance jointly released by the U.S. departments of Education and Justice in January 2014 not only mentions implicit bias as a factor that may affect the administration of school discipline, it also encourages school personnel to receive implicit bias training. (For more information on that guidance, see page 12.) Speaking not only to the importance of identifying implicit bias but also to mitigating its effects, the federal guidance asserts that this training can “enhance staff awareness of their implicit or unconscious biases and the harms associated with using or failing to counter racial and ethnic stereotypes.” Of course, teachers who voluntarily choose to pursue this training and explore this issue on their own can also generate interest among their colleagues, leading to more conversations and awareness.

Accumulated research evidence indicates that implicit bias powerfully explains the persistence of many societal inequities, not just in education but also in other domains, such as criminal justice, healthcare, and employment. While the notion of being biased is one that few individuals are eager to embrace, extensive social science and neuroscience research has connected individuals’ System 1 unconscious associations to disparate outcomes, even among individuals who staunchly profess egalitarian intentions.

In education, the real-life implications of implicit biases can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievement for some students—a stark contrast to the values and intentions of educators and administrators who dedicate their professional lives to their students’ success. Thus, it is critical for educators to identify any discrepancies that may exist between their conscious ideals and unconscious associations so that they can mitigate the effects of those implicit biases, thereby improving student outcomes and allowing students to reach their full potential.
Webinars on Supportive School Discipline

WHEN DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS ARISE, where can educators turn? The AFT’s own Share My Lesson (www.sharemylesson.com). In addition to providing free lesson plans, classroom activities, and articles on current events, Share My Lesson offers free, on-demand webinars that educators can watch from the comfort of home. Many of these webinars focus on common issues related to school climate and classroom management, like the ones below.

Social-Emotional Learning and Positive Classroom Culture

Creating a positive classroom culture in elementary school can go a long way in preventing student discipline issues later. Many prekindergarten and kindergarten students have never been in a formal classroom setting, and it is important that they learn the value of kindness. In Creating a Kind Classroom Culture (www.bit.ly/1qUjIB), a 1-hourlong webinar created by the Share My Lesson team and the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, teachers can learn how to foster acts of kindness among students. Other webinars to help cultivate a positive classroom culture include:

- Animated Characters Can Teach SEL Skills to Students Ages 4-8 (www.bit.ly/1P65STQ)
- A Tool to Model Appropriate Behavior for Back to School Readiness (www.bit.ly/1P65XXk)

Supporting Students’ Positive Behaviors

Middle and high school students need positive reinforcements for behavior too. A great way educators can keep discipline problems at bay is by getting to know students. The webinar Connect with Your Students Right from the Start (www.bit.ly/1WQxMf), by author Julia G. Thompson, helps educators make connections that encourage students to respect teachers and their peers. Other webinars that focus on supporting positive behavior include:

- PBIS in the Classroom: The Essentials to Support Responsible Student Behavior (www.bit.ly/1Wru9YA)
- Prevent Discipline Problems with a Positive Classroom Environment (www.bit.ly/1UY67sj)
- Supporting Youth-Adult Partnerships: Lessons in Encouraging Upstander Behavior (www.bit.ly/1EAWX9)

Learning effective techniques to foster a positive school climate and a positive classroom culture can take time and effort. But Share My Lesson’s webinars provide easy-to-follow tips and strategies for every educator. The best part? Educators receive one professional development credit for each webinar they complete.

–THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

Understanding Implicit Bias

(Continued from page 33)

Endnotes

3. See, for example, George A. Miller, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information,” Psychological Review 63, no. 2 (1956): 81–97.
8. See, for example, Cheryl Staats and Danya Contractor, Race and Discipline in Ohio Schools: What the Data Say (Columbus, OH: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2014).
13. Okonofua and Eberhardt, “Two Strikes.”
15. Reeves, Written in Black & White, 6.
20. Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954). Allport also recognizes a fourth condition for optimal intergroup contact, which is authority sanctioning the contact.
28. For more on implicit bias and its effects in various professions, see the Kirwan Institute’s annual State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review publication at www.kirwan institute.osu.edu/initiatives/implicit-bias-review.
Strategies for Overcoming Implicit Bias

1. **Stereotype replacement**: Recognize that a stereotype has been activated, think about why, and then actively substitute a non-stereotypical thought. (Devine et al., 2012).

2. **Counter Stereotypic Imagining**: Imagine an individual or situation that counteracts your stereotype reaction in detail (Devine et al., 2012). For instance, if I realized I was assuming that women are bad drivers, I could take a moment to imagine a woman being a really great driver. For example, an experiment showed that students exposed to images of famous African Americans showed a weaker pro-white bias (Banaji and Greenwald, p. 150). In a similar example, female college students showed a reduced male=leader and male=math bias after encountering female faculty members (p. 152).

3. **Individuation**: Recognize when you have stereotyped someone according to their group affiliation, and then try to think about things that make them individual (Devine et al., 2012).

4. **Perspective-taking**: Think about what it would be like to be a member of the group (Devine et al., 2012).

5. **Positive Contact**: Increase opportunities for positive contact with members of a stereotyped group (Devine et al., 2012). Find opportunities to meet people that are different.

6. **Doubt objectivity**: Remember that our mindbugs make it difficult for us to be objective all of the time; assuming we are objective may actually lead us to be less objective (Kang et al., 2012, p. 1173).

7. **Increase motivation to be fair**: Learn about and share information about implicit bias to increase internal motivation to be fair (Kang et al., 2012, p. 1175).

8. **Improve conditions of decision-making**: Take special care to engage in thoughtful decision-making (Kang et al., 2012, p. 1177).

9. **Count**: Use data to determine whether racially-disparate outcomes are present (Kang et al., 2012, p. 1178).


Module 4: Framework for Interventions
Chapter 11

Eliminating Disparities in School Discipline:
A Framework for Intervention

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Race and gender disparities in school discipline and associated harms have been well documented for decades. Suspension from school can reduce instructional time and impede academic progress for students who may already be lagging in their achievement. This chapter offers a research-based framework for increasing equity in school discipline. The framework is composed of ten principles that hold promise for helping educators to address student behavior in a developmentally appropriate manner and reduce race and gender disparities in school discipline. The framework also informs directions for future research in school discipline.

Federal and state actions to reduce racial disparities in discipline respond to a decade of findings (e.g., American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008) on the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline in improving educational outcomes and their disparate impact on students based on their racial/ethnic group membership, thereby violating civil rights protections. Male and female Black students disproportionately receive discipline referrals and out-of-school suspension (Fabelo et al., 2011), most often at a rate two to three times greater than White students. Disproportionate discipline has also been documented for males, Latinos, American Indians, and students in special education (U.S. Department of Justice/Department of Education, 2014). Recent research has raised concerns that lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender students are also at heightened risk of receiving discipline sanctions (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Poteat, Scheer, & Chong, 2015).
Findings such as these have led policymakers and educators in school districts across the country to examine how best to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, especially for students from marginalized groups. The rapid pace of reform has outstripped research and documentation. While some evaluations of district-level efforts show significant reductions in rates of exclusionary discipline across racial–ethnic groups (e.g., González, 2015; Osher, Poirier, Jarjoura, Brown, & Kendziora, 2015), few investigations have focused specifically on the discipline gap and even fewer have demonstrated a shrinkage of that gap.

We seek to inform current reforms through a systematic synthesis of promising policies and practices for reducing disciplinary disparities. We draw on naturalistic research and the few extant published intervention studies to propose the Framework for Increasing Equity in School Discipline. The Framework includes 10 school principles that hold promise for reducing race and gender disparities in school discipline. We intentionally offer numerous principles that span many aspects of the ecology of schooling. Narrow, singular interventions targeting only one aspect of schooling will not likely disrupt entrenched patterns of racial and gender inequality. Thus, the principles address varying levels of the school ecology including intrapersonal (educator beliefs and attitudes), interpersonal (quality of individual and group interactions), instructional (academic rigor, cultural relevancy and responsiveness of instruction), and systems levels (access to behavioral supports and avenues for collaborative approaches to resolving conflicts).

In describing the Framework’s principles, we distinguish between prevention and intervention-oriented action. Schools that successfully develop communities of responsive and supportive adults and motivated and engaged learners typically prevent disciplinary incidents and punitive responses to behavior from occurring in the first place (Emmer & Sabornie, 2014). Yet, as with all communities, some conflict is inevitable. When conflict happens, it can be addressed in a constructive and equitable manner. Thus, 5 of the 10 principles address prevention, four are intervention oriented, laying the groundwork for constructive responses to conflict and reduced unnecessary discipline, and one addresses both prevention and intervention (see Table 1).

Without what might be called “culturally conscious implementation,” there is the risk that advantaged students will reap the rewards of less punitive discipline policies and practices while marginalized students continue to receive more punitive treatment. Thus, we posit the need for culturally conscious implementation of the Framework’s 10 principles. This means educators need to explicitly consider issues of culture, race, gender, power, and privilege in addressing inequality in schooling (Gay, 2010, Ladson-Billings, 2009; C. S. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004; Winn, 2016).

We begin by reviewing emerging federal, state, and district reforms to describe the current context for intervention. We then discuss the typical approaches to intervention and argue the racial and gender gaps will only substantially reduce when educators undertake culturally conscious implementation of reforms. We then synthesize available research that supports our selection of each of the 10 principles in the Framework for Increasing Equity in School Discipline, and we offer some preliminary considerations about their culturally conscious implementation.
Evidence of the deleterious correlates of exclusionary discipline has continued to grow. Multivariate and longitudinal studies demonstrate that exclusionary discipline is a risk factor for a host of short- and long-term negative consequences, including academic disengagement, depressed academic achievement, school dropout, and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams,

### TABLE 1
Framework for Increasing Equity in School Discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention and Intervention</th>
<th>1. Supportive Relationships</th>
<th>Authentic connections are forged between and among teachers and students.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Bias-Aware Classrooms</td>
<td>Inclusive, positive classroom and school environments are established in which students feel fairly treated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and Respectful School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>3. Academic Rigor</td>
<td>The potential of all students is promoted through high expectations and high-level learning opportunities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Culturally Relevant and</td>
<td>Instruction reflects and is respectful of the diversity of today's classrooms and schools.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Responsive Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Opportunities for</td>
<td>Behavior is approached from a nonpunitive mind-set, and instruction proactively strengthens student social skills, while providing structured opportunities for behavioral correction within the classroom as necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning and Correcting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>6. Data-Based Inquiry for</td>
<td>Data are used regularly to identify “hot spots” of disciplinary conflict or differential treatment of particular groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Problem-Solving Approaches to Discipline</td>
<td>Solutions aim to uncover sources of behavior or teacher–student conflict and address the identified needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Inclusion of Student and</td>
<td>Student and family voice are integrated into policies, procedures, and practices concerning school discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Voice on Conflicts’ Causes and Solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Reintegration of Students after Conflict or Absence</td>
<td>Students are supported in reentering the community of learners after conflict or long-term absence has occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Multitiered System of</td>
<td>Schools use a tiered framework to match increasing levels of intensity of support to students’ differentiated needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The numerical ordering of principles is not meant to suggest their relative importance.*

THE CONTEXT FOR INTERVENTION

Evidence of the deleterious correlates of exclusionary discipline has continued to grow. Multivariate and longitudinal studies demonstrate that exclusionary discipline is a risk factor for a host of short- and long-term negative consequences, including academic disengagement, depressed academic achievement, school dropout, and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams,
A recent meta-analysis of 24 studies found evidence of a link between in-school and out-of-school suspension and low achievement (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015).

Although concerns about racial disproportionality go back at least to the 1970s, when the Children’s Defense Fund (1975) published a report on disparities in suspensions for children of color, it was not until the late 1990s that the issue began to attract wider notice. The current wave of reform has been field-driven in many ways. Young people, parents, and civil rights advocates began documenting growing rates of suspensions, expulsions and arrests in schools, and their disproportionate impact on students of color (Mediratta, 2012) using the term school-to-prison pipeline to describe a pattern of educational exclusion and justice system involvement (Ginwright, 2004). Efforts by grassroots community groups such as Padres y Jóvenes Unidos in Denver, CADRE in Los Angeles, and Voices of Youth in Chicago Education demonstrated not only the need for reform but also how partnerships could be built with local schools and districts to develop positive interventions and supports to manage student behavior (Padres y Jóvenes Unidos & Advancement Project, 2010; Rogers & Terriquez, 2013).

By 2014, research and advocacy had established that exclusionary discipline in U.S. public schools constituted a problem of serious proportions. Faced with evidence of the widespread use of these sanctions and the extreme disparities for students of color, policymakers have begun to implement national, state, and local initiatives to reduce rates of suspension and expulsion and increase the use of alternatives (Losen & Martinez, 2013; Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014).

National Level

The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education launched the national Supportive School Discipline Initiative to improve data collection, expand technical assistance, and inform reform efforts by state and local officials (U.S. Department of Justice/Department of Education, 2011). In January 2014, the two agencies jointly released a two-part federal guidance document with recommended practices for fostering supportive and equitable school discipline. Most recently, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA S. 1177), which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary School Act and includes a number of provisions intended to reduce disciplinary exclusion and disparities in exclusion. Every Student Succeeds Act identifies school climate as an indicator of student success, requires local education agencies to detail how they will reduce the overuse of exclusionary discipline, and permits districts to use federal funding for intervention services such as parent engagement, school-based mental health services, and multitiered systems of support (Capatosto, 2015).

State-Level Changes

States and school districts across the nation have taken action concurrently with the federal-level changes. Often driven by local advocates, at least 17 states have passed legislation on discipline and climate in recent years (Colombi & Osher, 2015). Provisions in state law aim to do the following:
• **Limit out-of-school suspension and expulsion:** California passed measures to curtail the use of suspension, expulsion and referral to law enforcement, and most recently a bill (AB420) that eliminates *willful defiance* as a reason for suspension, which has been associated with particularly extreme levels of disparities (California Department of Education, 2015).

• **Collect disaggregated data and reduce disparities in exclusionary discipline:** In 2014, Illinois mandated the reporting of disaggregated data on discipline and, beginning in 2017, requires districts in the top 20% of use of exclusionary discipline to submit an improvement plan for reducing exclusion and racial disparities (State of Illinois, 2014).

• **Implement alternatives to suspension and expulsion:** Building on a pilot program in Denver, the state of Colorado has expanded the use of restorative justice (RJ) in programs throughout the state (Restorative Justice Colorado, 2015).

**School District Reform Efforts**

Attempts to reform school disciplinary practices have also made their way to the district level. District-wide reform has been documented in numerous school districts across the country, including the following:

• **Denver:** Beginning in 2005, the Denver Public Schools, in partnership with the advocacy group Padres & Jovenes Unidos, implemented RJ practices in selected pilot schools and later expanded them to much of the district (Padres y Jóvenes Unidos & Advancement Project. 2005). Between 2006 and 2013, the overall suspension rate dropped from 10.58% to 5.63%, and the gap between Black and White students decreased from a 12- to 8-point gap (González, 2015).

• **Oakland:** In 2005, the Oakland Unified School District initiated a pilot program of RJ at Cole Middle School and saw an 87% decrease in suspensions in three years (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). By 2014, they expanded the program to 24 schools. In the middle and high schools with RJ programming, suspensions decreased by 23% between 2010 and 2013, and dropout rates declined by 56% (Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014).

• **Los Angeles Unified School District:** This was among the first large urban districts to substantially revise its Code of Conduct, and data show declines in suspension and expulsion (http://www.publicintegrity.org/2014/01/31/14201/new-california-data-show-drop-overall-school-suspensions-expulsions).

**TYPICAL APPROACHES TO REFORM**

Stokes and Baer (1977) first identified the strategy of “train and hope” to describe the faulty assumptions behind efforts to generalize individual’s behavior change, arguing that attempting to teach an individual a new behavior and then hoping it will generalize to other settings, times, or individuals is not an effective strategy for ensuring generalizable change. In the same way, many strategies for addressing disparate outcomes in school might be termed “implement and hope”—taking a strategy that
has shown positive outcomes for students in general, and assuming it will be equally effective in (that is, generalize to) reducing racial/ethnic disparities. The “implement and hope” strategy is so deeply engrained that data often are not disaggregated, precluding tracking, and assessment of implementation effects on target populations. Indeed, one recent report described how fewer than half of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (SWPBIS) schools that entered ethnicity enrollment information into their SWPBIS data system examined disaggregated discipline data by group even once during the school year (McIntosh, Eliason, Horner, & May, 2014).

Evidence suggests that, even in the case of empirically based interventions, implementation without explicit attention to addressing disparities is like its individual analogue, unlikely to reduce discipline disparities. Studying a nationally representative sample of 346 elementary and middle schools implementing SWPBIS for at least 1 year, Skiba et al. (2011) found that Black students remained twice as likely as their White peers to be referred to the office, and that Latino and Black students were more likely than White students to receive suspensions or expulsions as a consequence for similar behaviors, especially for minor misbehavior. Vincent, Swain-Bradway, Tobin, and May (2011) found that, even in schools in which SWPBIS decreased overall school rates of out-of-school suspension, Black students continued to be overrepresented in out-of-school suspensions, particularly suspensions longer than 10 days. Such data underscore the need for explicit consideration of issues of culture, power, and privilege in addressing inequality in schooling (Gay, 2010, Ladson-Billings, 2009; C. S. Weinstein et al., 2004; Winn, 2016). The failure to create equitable outcomes for students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds has led to recommendations for better integration of sociocultural aspects in the design, implementation, and interpretation of interventions (Olmeda & Kauffman, 2003; Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS IMPLEMENTATION

Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2015) argue that schools cannot effectively target racial disparities in discipline without addressing longstanding issues of race and power. They write,

It is impossible to tell the full story of racial discipline disparities without considering the full range of racialized historical and current factors that shape school life in the United States. The ravages of slavery and Jim Crow, forced migration, and policies that enforced unequal treatment placed African Americans and most people of color at an economic and social disadvantage that persists to this day. (p. 2)

They continue,

Regrettably, our history also left us with pervasive and false ideas about “races” that have shaped our perceptions of who is valued and who is not, who is capable and who is not, and who is “safe” and who is “dangerous.” (p. 2)

Winn (2011) and Morris (2016) also point out that efforts to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline need to address the varying forms of discrimination that thwart the
positive development of youth depending on their identities and social locations (e.g., race, gender, social class, sexual and gender identity). Together, these scholars raise the importance of considering the interacting sociohistorical forces that contribute to the current disparities in school discipline. According to Carter et al. (2015), such considerations extend to how we approach affecting change. Specifically, they call for a race-conscious approach to intervention. We expand on their call and posit the need for a “culturally conscious” approach to implementing reforms. A handful of tenets underlie our conceptualization of “culturally conscious implementation”:

1. We use the term “culture” broadly, referencing the beliefs and behaviors of groups that are bound to history and are passed down from generation to generation. We also see that students and educators in schools perpetuate beliefs and behavior through their own shared culture. For instance, educators can share implicit beliefs that punishment is the appropriate response to student rule-breaking.

2. Interactions among educators, family, and students are sociohistorically situated within a longstanding history of racial and class segregation and unequal schooling (Carter et al., 2015). As Ladson-Billings (2006) describes, achievement gaps reflect the “educational debt” that has accrued over time. Thus, culturally conscious implementation considers the differential access marginalized groups have had to high quality schooling given the current and historical legacy of racial and socioeconomic segregation in neighborhoods and schools.

3. Sociocultural and historical narratives shape perceptions and judgments about the “appropriateness” of behavior. Bal, Thorius, and Kozleski (2012) write, “Racial minority students’ experiences and cultural and linguistic practices (i.e., ways of knowing, behaving, and being) are often devalued and/or pathologized . . .” (p. 4). In terms of discipline, this means that students of color can be subject to differential selection—their behavior can be “selected” for punishment (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). For example, teachers’ culturally based judgments about dress, speech, vocal tone, and body language can fuel whether or not a teacher “reads” Black students’ behavior as defiant or disruptive (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). Dominant beliefs about what it means to display appropriate female behavior can also affect treatment toward students. For example, Morris (2016) describes adults’ negative appraisals of Black females who are loud or have an “attitude”—negative appraisals which, according to Morris, come from a lack of understanding of Black girls’ desire to be heard and seen in the context of gender and race oppression.

4. While Black/White disparities in school discipline have been documented in U.S. public schools for over four decades (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975), disproportionate discipline has also been documented for a range of other groups including males, Latinos, American Indians, students in special education, and lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender students (Anyon et al., 2014; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Poteat et al., 2015; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). This raises concerns about how “difference” is policed in schools and
indicates the need for an intersectional lens to understand how expectations/norms for “respectable” behavior span varying aspects of identity (Snapp & Russell, 2016). For instance, gender–non-conforming girls of color who identify as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer may challenge many adults’ behavioral expectations based on White, heterosexual, hyperfeminine forms of self-presentation (Chmielewski, Belmonte, Stoudt, & Fine, 2016).

5. Racism and negative stereotypes are powerful influences on the punitive treatment of students of color. Indeed, Black male and female students are subject to harsher sanctions than their White peers, even when controlling for the seriousness of their infractions (Skiba et al., 2014), the frequency of being involved in discipline incidents (Anyon et al., 2014), and the levels of teacher-reported misbehavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010). Moreover, a recent statewide study showed that Black females had 13% higher odds of discipline in a year than White males, accounting for student grade retention and student- and school-level poverty (Blake et al., 2016). This body of research demonstrates that Black students are treated more harshly when compared to similar students, suggesting that race, in the form of stereotypes and implicit bias, affects everyday interactions in school (Carter et al., 2015). Thus, culturally conscious implementation efforts need to further recognize differential sanction of marginalized groups.

FRAMEWORK FOR INCREASING EQUITY IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Studies of the effects of interventions currently are too few in number to support a meta-analysis. Yet the extensive research on the existence and causes of disparities in discipline (Losen, 2015; Skiba, Mediratta, & Rausch, 2016) makes it possible to identify research-based principles on which intervention to reduce disciplinary data can be based. Below, we present a framework of 10 research-based principles for disparity-reducing intervention in schools. The following 10 principles were identified in a review of research by the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative, a group of 26 researchers, policymakers, educators, and advocates (Discipline Disparities Collaborative, 2015). Eight of these 10 principles were presented in prior publications from the Discipline Disparities Collaborative (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2016).

The Framework’s principles are not exhaustive, and future theory and research may augment or condense them. With that caveat in mind, we explore the extent of empirical support for each of the 10 principles, drawing findings from studies using a wide range of methodologies (ethnography to randomized controlled trials). In addition, we consider how each practice relates specifically to disparities in school discipline for marginalized groups. We draw on the extant research which largely compares the experience of Black and White students, but when possible, we also draw from more recent research which identifies disparities in rates of exclusionary discipline for other racial/ethnic categories (e.g., Latino, American Indian), and by gender, disability status, and sexual orientation and gender identity (Skiba et al., 2016). We also offer some preliminary ideas that relate to the culturally conscious implementation of each principle in the Framework.
Principle 1: Supportive Relationships

A convincing accumulation of research has shown that students who feel supported by their teachers tend to be more engaged in academic work and have fewer disciplinary interactions with adults in school, relative to their peers who experience less support. Two meta-analyses have substantiated the link between the affective dimension of teacher–student relationships and student engagement in school. Examining results across 119 studies, Cornelius-White (2007) found that teacher empathy ($r = .32$) and warmth ($r = .32$) were associated with positive student outcomes. In a meta-analysis of 99 studies, Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011) found medium to large effects for both positive relationships and engagement ($r = .39, p < .01$) and negative relationships and engagement ($r = -.32, p < .01$). Of particular concern is the likelihood that negative relationships with teachers in the early years of schooling may have cumulative adverse effects across grade levels (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Rubie-Davies et al., 2014).

A recent randomized control trial of a teacher coaching program demonstrated that strengthening relationships made a difference for students in groups who receive high rates of discipline. In the My Teaching Partner–Secondary (MTP-S) program, teachers were randomly assigned to a business-as-usual or a coaching condition (Gregory, Hafen, et al., 2016). Coaches worked individually with teachers to increase the emotional, organizational, and instructional supports in their classrooms. During the 2 years of coaching and the year after coaching was discontinued, the MTP-S teachers issued discipline referrals to Black and non-Black students at similarly low rates. The control teachers, in contrast, had a large racial gap in discipline referrals. In classrooms where teachers improved in observed sensitivity to students’ social and emotional needs, Black students were less likely to be issued a disciplinary referral than their peers in classrooms where teachers showed less improvement. We might speculate that MTP-S teachers developed trusting relationships with their Black students—treat them as individuals and possibly disrupting negative behavioral stereotypes about Black students.

Culturally Conscious Implementation

Given that the teaching force in the United States is predominantly White and female (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013), educators need to ensure that they are attuned to the social and emotional experiences of students of color in an intentional manner. This is underscored by the growing body of evidence demonstrating that Latino and Black students are less likely than White students to report feeling cared about by an adult at school (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2014; Fan, Williams, & Corkin, 2011; Voight, Hanson, O’Malley, & Adekanyel, 2015).

Principle 2: Bias-Aware Classrooms and Respectful School Environments

Emerging findings raise the possibility that educators’ disciplinary decision making may be influenced by implicit racial bias—unconsciously held negative
associations linked to racial stereotypes. A meta-analysis of 184 studies of implicit bias concluded that, generally speaking, implicit bias predicts differential treatment of dissimilar individuals (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). A recent experimental study found a link between race and teacher perceptions of student behavior. Teachers were shown an office discipline referral for a student with two incidents of misconduct, the name of the disciplined student varied between those that are stereotypically Black (Darnell or Deshawn) and White (Greg or Jake; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Teachers responded with more severe disciplinary actions to students with stereotypically Black names than those with names that are stereotypically White. Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) also found that the more likely teachers were to think the student was Black, the more likely they were to label the student a troublemaker. Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, and DiTomasso (2014) found that Black boys are generally viewed as older and more culpable than White peers, and that the characteristic of innocence, typically associated with childhood, is less frequently applied to Black boys relative to White boys.

A recent randomized field experiment demonstrates how respectful teacher interactions may reduce negative disciplinary outcomes of marginalized students (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016). Okonofua et al. (2016) randomly assigned 39 math teachers to an empathic mind-set intervention or a control condition (an intervention about the use of technology to promote learning). In the empathic mind-set intervention, teachers read an article and student testimonials on a range of nonpejorative factors that affect student misconduct and how positive relationships with teachers help students thrive. The teachers were then asked to write about how they use these ideas in their own practice and were told their written contributions would be integrated into the teacher training program. The aim of the empathic mind-set intervention was to increase teachers’ perspective taking about student misconduct and promote a context of trust and understanding. Findings showed that males and Black and Latino students in classrooms of teachers in the empathic mind-set intervention were half as likely to receive a suspension relative to their peers in the control teachers’ classrooms that school year (boys 8.4% vs. 14.6% and Black/Latinos: 6.3% vs. 12.3%, respectively). Importantly, students with histories of suspension felt more respected by math teachers in the empathic mind-set intervention versus the control intervention.

Culturally Conscious Implementation

Adolescents may be particularly adept at detecting unfair treatment based on implicit bias and negative stereotyping (Brown & Bigler, 2005), and these perceptions may in turn affect their disengagement or active resistance to authority in school (Yeager et al., 2014). This may be particularly salient for students of color. Based on interviews with Black girls, Morris (2016) discusses how their behavior can be a demonstration of resistance to gender and racial oppression. She writes, “The ‘attitude’ often attributed to Black girls casts as undesirable the skills of being astute at reading
their location—where they sit along the social hierarchy—and overcoming the attendant obstacles” (p. 19). She further states, “To be ‘loud’ is to be heard. To have ‘attitude’ is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment” (p. 19). Morris’s theorizing suggests that efforts to raise awareness about bias should include considering how deeply ingrained culturally bound notions of “appropriate” behavior may impact everyday interactions.

**Principle 3: Academic Rigor**

When students are engaged in and excited about academic activities, school discipline referrals are typically rare (Emmer & Sabornie, 2014). Cornelius-White’s (2007) meta-analysis of 199 studies found that teachers’ encouragement of higher order thinking ($r = .29$) and learning ($r = .23$) was associated with positive student outcomes. Access to instructionally rich and motivating classrooms, however, are not evenly distributed across student groups (e.g., Kena et al., 2015). Comparing the experiences of high- and low-tracked students, Wing (2006) found that high-achieving classrooms, composed of predominantly White and Asian students, had lively teacher and student engagement with interactive teaching styles and student autonomy, while more remedial classes, composed of predominantly Black and Latino students, emphasized tight management of behavior over student autonomy.

The results from two recent studies indicate that efforts to reduce racial disparities in discipline need to include providing more equitable access to rigorous and interactive curriculum and instruction (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016). Evaluating the effects of a tracking program using a regression discontinuity research design, Card and Giuliano (2016) compared outcomes between fourth- and fifth-grade students who were placed into gifted/high-achiever classrooms or into general education classrooms in a large urban school district. Relative to similar peers, Black students in the gifted/high-achiever classrooms made greater achievement gains and were less likely to receive suspension through sixth grade. Gregory et al.’s (2016) randomized control trial of MTP-S further corroborates the finding that access to cognitively rich and motivating instruction reduces students’ risk of receiving a discipline sanction. Teachers in the MTP-S coaching condition had no significant racial disparities in office discipline referrals compared with a large racial gap in discipline referrals among teachers in the control condition. Mediational analyses showed that the degree to which teachers were observed facilitating higher level thinking skills, problem solving, and metacognition was significantly linked to their equitable and infrequent use of discipline referrals.

**Culturally Conscious Implementation**

Efforts to increase access to academic rigor often take the form of ensuring students from marginalized groups have opportunities to enroll in advanced or honors-level coursework in high school (Handwerk, Tognatta, Coley, & Gitomer, 2008). While important, this singular focus is narrow and does not address the subtle ways
marginalized students can be denied access to academic rigor in special education and general education classrooms. Culturally conscious efforts to increase academic rigor, therefore, should address how teacher beliefs about marginalized students’ academic potential can impact everyday interactions that result in their receiving subpar instructional opportunities and content (R. S. Weinstein, 2002).

**Principle 4: Culturally Relevant and Responsive Teaching**

Culturally relevant and responsive instruction has been identified as a positive predictor of student outcomes in increasingly diverse classrooms. Gay (2010) argues that culturally responsive teachers acquire knowledge about their students’ cultural and social history and build trust with their students by communicating an understanding of their lives. This in turn helps them both understand student behavior and design instruction that helps students process their experiences of inequality and marginalization. C. S. Weinstein et al.’s (2004) model of culturally responsive classroom management consists of five components: (a) teacher recognition of their own ethnocentrism, (b) development of caring classroom communities, (c) incorporation of students’ cultural backgrounds in classroom learning experiences, (d) classroom management strategies that are in synch with those backgrounds, and (e) teacher understanding of the social, economic, and political issues facing their students.

Empirical evidence for the promise of culturally relevant and responsive teaching in reducing disparities in school discipline primarily arises from small-scale qualitative studies of classrooms and small groups of teachers. Researchers have provided rich descriptions of how culturally responsive relationships elicit student engagement and cooperation (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Howard, 2010). Ethnographic research with eight female teachers of mostly Black youth by Ladson-Billings (2009) found that teachers who most effectively engaged their Black male students in a culturally responsive manner were those that (a) affirmed and celebrated their culture, (b) integrated students’ life experiences into the curriculum, and (c) communicated high academic expectations while scaffolding rigorous academic work. Using this perspective, the Oakland Unified School District developed the Manhood Development Program, an in-school elective for Black male students, which aims to foster positive cultural identities, social and emotional competence, and academic skills (Watson, 2014).

Although theory has outpaced empirical studies in this area, a growing number of related studies link student participation in culturally relevant coursework with subsequent academic outcomes. Kisker et al. (2012) argue that culturally relevant coursework, such as ethnic studies, is meaningful and engaging to students whose cultural heritage is not recognized or honored in typical curricula. Using data from a large urban district in a regression discontinuity design study, Dee and Penner (2016) compared the trajectories of similarly low-achieving ninth graders who were or were not assigned to an ethnic studies course. Their sample consisted of 1,405 students (60% Asian, 23% Latino, 6% Black) in five unique school-year cohorts enrolled in three high schools in San Francisco. They found that assignment to ethnic studies
increased attendance, grade point average, and ninth-grade credits earned. Importantly, the findings held for students with prior school suspensions, offering compelling evidence that culturally relevant courses can actually shift students’ educational trajectories.

**Culturally Conscious Implementation**

School curricula, schoolwide events, and library resources are forums for educators to present content that is relevant to students’ lives. A culturally conscious approach is not limited to making content relevant to only one aspect of students’ identity (e.g., ethnicity). Instead, it considers the need to connect with the range of racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and sexual identities and experiences of students and communities (e.g., Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2011). Also, it is not limited to increasing the relevancy of content. A culturally conscious approach includes reflecting on how interactions in classrooms have a cultural basis that aligns or misaligns with varying student communities (e.g., Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005). For example, the Double Check teacher coaching program aims to support teachers in such critical reflection and is currently being evaluated in a randomized controlled trial in elementary and middle schools (Bradshaw, Pas, & Debnam, 2015; Hershfeldt et al., 2010).

**Principle 5: Opportunities for Learning and Correcting Behavior**

A stream of professional development programming draws on behavioral theory and the strategic use of extrinsic rewards to help schools utilize a behavioral-supports approach to student behavior (Kamps et al., 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2010). When educators respond with specific praise to desired behavior, students tend to decrease disruptive behavior and increase the reinforced behavior (e.g., Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). For example, in the Class Wide Function–related Intervention Teams program (CW-FIT), teachers use a social skills game format and reward teams of students who demonstrate social skills taught through direct instruction (Kamps et al., 2015). Similarly, in SWPBIS, school staff teach all students jointly agreed-on, schoolwide expectations for behavior (e.g., be respectful) and issue students tangible reinforcers for positive behavior such as tickets that earn them special privileges. Both CW-FIT and SWPBIS have been shown to reduce disruptive behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Kamps et al., 2015). Through such programming, adult behavior may also change. When educators intentionally increase their focus on, and praise of, positive student behavior they may shift away from reprimands and punitive mind-sets (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, et al., 2010).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs draw on theory about the development of self-discipline through social and emotional competencies (Bear, Whitcomb, Elias, & Blank, 2015). Evidence that students’ SEL skills in early childhood are closely tied to their later well-being (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015) has provided momentum for revised discipline policies and new practices that offer students
greater opportunities to learn and practice social and emotional “literacies.” A meta-analysis found that SEL programs can strengthen students’ SEL skills which in turn relate to a range of positive outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Culturally Conscious Implementation

When schools offer more opportunities for students to learn SEL skills and correct behavior, it needs to be recognized that the selected SEL skills and expectations are culturally based and infused with a value system. Educators prioritize culturally laden types of SEL skills and, therefore, may unintentionally marginalize certain forms of cultural expression (Morris, 2016). In addition, while schools often focus on developing students’ social and emotional competencies, there is a growing recognition that educators need support to deepen their own social emotional competencies as well as their skills in developing prosocial classrooms (Jennings & Frank, 2015, Milner, 2014). Jennings and Frank (2015) argue that teachers with high social and emotional competence have strong relationship-building skills and are better able to develop mutual understanding with their students, consider multiple perspectives during conflict, and resolve disputes with skill. Doing so in a culturally responsive manner may help educators navigate diverse cultural norms and defuse or prevent disciplinary interactions with marginalized students (Morris, 2016).

Principle 6: Data-Based Inquiry for Equity

Every Student Succeeds Act requires that state education agencies collect data from local education agencies on a range of discipline-related issues, including “rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement . . .” (Mandinach & Jackson, 2012, p. 47). While the collection and examination of accountability data in schools is not new to federal policy (Mandinach & Jackson, 2012), this is the first time that discipline outcomes have been integrated into federal accountability efforts.

What is measured and tracked in accountability systems is an indicator of outcomes that are valued. McIntosh et al.’s (2013) correlational study of 217 schools across 14 states showed that SWPBIS teams’ use of data was a statistically significant predictor of sustained SWPBIS implementation. The authors observe that the practice of regularly sharing data with the entire school staff likely communicated administration’s commitment to high-quality SWPBIS implementation to achieve improved student outcomes.

Culturally Conscious Implementation

States and localities that collect, disaggregate, and share discipline data signal the importance of identifying and addressing discipline disparities. In response to advocates’ demands for greater transparency, state legislatures are increasing public access to disaggregated discipline data (e.g., Washington State, 2015) and districts are
beginning to use data in a process of goal setting and continuous improvement (e.g., Meridian Consent Order, 2013). To support these efforts, the federally funded National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments recently issued recommendations on using data to reduce discipline disparities that include data analysis, identifying root causes and developing an action plan (Osher et al., 2015). Identifying patterns in the data can help educators strategically direct their intervention efforts to address the specific issues that are causing high racial and gender disparities in disciplinary referrals (Scott, Hirn, & Barber, 2012).

**Principle 7: Problem-Solving Approaches to Discipline**

When school community members come together to identify contributors to discipline incidents and jointly develop plans to help resolve those incidents, they are engaging in a problem-solving approach to discipline. For example, teachers, specialists, and/or parents might collaborate in a problem-solving process to understand individual students’ academic or behavioral challenges (Sheridan et al., 2012). Moreover, inquiry into what drives student behavior may, in itself, build trust and shared respect when students are given the opportunity to offer their “side of the story” (Sheets, 1996). Problem-solving approaches also may help uncover unaddressed learning or mental health needs of students who are typically “criminalized” or punished, resulting in more appropriate supports or trauma-informed care (Phifer & Hull, 2016; Ramey, 2015).

Research on problem-solving processes has been conducted on a schoolwide program, Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines (e.g., Cornell, 2013). A recent study found that the suspension gap between Black and White students narrowed when schools implemented a threat assessment team, which is a multidisciplinary team of school staff available to help students involved in a crisis or a conflict that included a threat of violence (Cornell, 2013). More recently, a statewide study of schools using the threat assessment protocol in Virginia found no racial disparities in suspension, expulsion, or arrest among students whose behavior prompted threat assessments (Cornell et al., 2016).

School community members also might engage in RJ or restorative practice (RP), which provides a structured process for problem solving in schools. For example, in a responsive circle or restorative conference, participants typically answer a series of restorative questions about a discipline incident (e.g., “Who has been affected by the incident?”; “What do you think needs to happen to make things right?” Wachtel, Costello, & Wachtel, 2009). Winn (2016) has proposed that RJ in the classroom may not only disrupt punitive practices and racial inequality but also engage students, their families, and school staff in critical dialogue about “notions of citizenship, belonging, and worthiness that can impact teacher practice and student learning” (p. 5).

Case studies of schools implementing RJ/RP in the United States and internationally document schoolwide reductions in exclusionary discipline (e.g., Anyon et al., 2014; International Institute of Restorative Practices, 2014). As of yet, however, there
is not enough empirical evidence to claim that RJ/RP, as currently implemented, results in substantial reductions in race and gender discipline disparities. A few studies of districts using RJ have shown that Black students had the greatest decline in the suspension rates, relative to other student groups (González, 2015; Jain et al., 2014). Yet, persistent and large Black/White suspension gaps in these districts and the uneven implementation across district schools suggests that more research is needed to understand the potential of RJ and how to implement it with high fidelity across schools (Anyon et al., 2014; Gregory & Clawson, 2016).

**Culturally Conscious Implementation**

When implementing problem-solving approaches to conflict educators need to vigilantly watch for how such reforms can revert to shaming, punitive processes that do not authentically engage the voices of marginalized youth and their families. In other words, collaborative problem solving may become part of discipline policy, but in the day-to-day, they may be implemented in a superficial manner that masks hidden agendas reflecting the traditional, underlying stance toward punishment and exclusion. Moreover, culturally conscious implementation of problem-solving approaches need to explicitly address issues of power and privilege. For example, the Oakland Unified School District’s RJ implementation guide indicates that a social justice orientation to RJ includes acknowledging that race, gender, and sexual orientation inequities of the larger society impact students’ academic and life outcomes, recognizing historical harms when appropriate, and ensuring students in marginalized groups have forums where their concerns can be effectively addressed (Yusem et al., 2016).

**Principle 8: Inclusion of Student and Family Voice on Causes and Solutions of Conflicts**

A number of school districts are revising their school discipline policies to improve student and family engagement in the disciplinary process (e.g., Syracuse City School District, *Student Code of Conduct, Character, and Support*). This area of policy reform is supported by a diverse body of research demonstrating the feasibility of student and family engagement in addressing discipline incidents and behavioral challenges (e.g., Patton, Jolivette, & Ramsey, 2006). Schools can integrate student voice and family perspectives in many different ways—for example, students might set their own behavioral goals and self-monitor their progress (Patton et al., 2006) or lead a restorative circle with their classmates to address a problem in the classroom (Wachtel et al., 2009). Research has demonstrated that students are more likely to cooperate when they feel fairly treated by teachers (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Sheets, 1996). Moreover, they tend to be more engaged and motivated in classrooms where they are allowed to express their opinions and exhibit autonomy (Reeve, 2009). Similarly, respectfully engaging family perspectives to help address discipline incidents can build trust and increase the likelihood of a positive resolution to disciplinary incidents (Sheridan et al., 2012).
Integrating student and family perspectives into the disciplinary process may be especially important for building trust between educators and students from marginalized groups. Several recent studies show that Black and Latino students report less adult support in school compared with their White peers (Bottiani et al., 2014; Voight et al., 2015). Ethnic minority parents also have reported the need for educators to engage them in a respectful and culturally competent manner (National Education Association of the United States, 2010). Respectful and regular engagement of historically disenfranchised voices in school could engender the type of trust needed for constructive collaboration to prevent or diffuse disciplinary interactions that fuel race and gender disparities in discipline (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Winn, 2016).

**Principle 9: Reintegration of Students After Conflict or Absence**

Rearrest rates of youth released from the juvenile justice system have highlighted the need for “reentry programs” (Bonnie, Johnson, Chemers, & Schuck, 2013). Osher, Amos, and Gonsoulin (2012) recommend that supports for formerly incarcerated youth engage members from the student’s “ecology” to help them successfully reintegrate into their schools and communities. Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, and Havel (2002) followed youth after their release and found that those who received appropriate aftercare services—mental health, substance abuse treatment, educational supports, and others—were more than three times as likely to be positively engaged in their community after 12 months, relative to their released peers without such services.

Disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline requires reducing students’ odds of rearrest and repeated suspensions. This is especially important since state rearrest rates can be as high as 50% to 80% for high-risk youth over a 1- to 3-year follow-up period (Seigle, Walsh, & Weber, 2014). Reductions in rearrest would be especially beneficial to students in groups who are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, including Black youth, who account for half of all juvenile arrests for violent crimes (U.S. Department of Justice/Department of Education, 2014).

**Culturally Conscious Implementation**

Recognizing the risk associated with transitions back to school, some districts have taken steps to create formal reentry procedures for students returning from long-term suspensions. From 2013 to 2014, the Oakland Unified School District provided RJ programming to students as part of a formal reentry procedure after incarceration, involuntary transfer, or suspension (Jain et al., 2014). Students were offered individual meetings or reentry circles including teachers, counselors, friends, and family to welcome them back into the school community and proactively provide wraparound supports. Culturally conscious supports need to also consider the multiple interacting stressors students face as relate to their social positioning. For example, gender-conscious reentry programs for girls released from juvenile detention might address girls’ needs for reproductive health education/support or treatment for sexual abuse (Winn, 2011).
Principle 10: Multitiered System of Supports

Finally, schools across the nation are implementing multitiered systems of support (MTSS) to provide a comprehensive approach to prevention and intervention (MTSS; Vincent, Inglish, Girvan, Sprague, & McCab, 2016). The MTSS approach offers districts a systematic way to track data and provide prevention and intervention services that reduce exclusionary responses to student behavior. The emphasis on providing access to supports when students exhibit behaviors that violate school rules and expectations is especially needed for students in groups overrepresented in discipline sanctions (Ramey, 2015).

MTSS is characterized by a tiered framework, drawn from public health, that calibrates the intensity of behavioral supports to students’ behavioral needs, with more intensive supports offered when more general strategies fail to resolve the problem. For example, when students are not responsive to Tier 1 social and behavioral programs in the classroom, they can be referred to Tier 2 interventions in small groups or individual sessions outside of the classroom (Bradshaw et al., 2014). SWPBIS is the most widely disseminated and extensively studied MTSS (Vincent et al., 2016), but the multitiered framework has also been used with other types of positive discipline programming such as RJ/RP programming (Jain et al., 2014).

The most extensive research on the promise of MTSS frameworks for reducing disparities has been conducted within the SWPBIS framework. Experimental trials have shown that implementing SWPBIS with fidelity can lead to reductions in negative student behavior and discipline referrals and suspensions (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009). Despite the general positive outcomes associated with SWPBIS, there have been inconsistent findings regarding discipline outcomes for marginalized students (Vincent et al., 2016). For example, Black elementary students have been found to have significantly greater odds of receiving a discipline referral than White students in schools with SWPBIS, even as those schools reduce disciplinary referrals in general (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, et al., 2010; Kaufman et al., 2010).

Culturally Conscious Implementation

The inconsistent results from SWPBIS in reducing disparities have led researchers to highlight the promising results of SWPBIS when it is integrated with explicitly culturally conscious practices. For example, in five Canadian schools implementing SWPBIS, Greiflund, McIntosh, Mercer, and May (2014) found that students with aboriginal status were no more likely to receive office disciplinary referrals than their peers. Similarly, Vincent, Sprague, CHiXapkaid, Tobin, and Gau (2015) identified several SWPBIS schools that had low suspension rates of American Indian students, a group historically over-represented in exclusionary discipline. The authors of both studies speculate that the racial equity in discipline in those schools may be due to the culturally responsive adaptations to SWPBIS which emphasized teacher training in cultural sensitivity, culturally relevant instruction,
and strong school relationships with parents and families (McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby, & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014).

Another promising direction is the integration of SWPBIS and RJ/RP. This blended approach, School-Wide Positive and Restorative Discipline includes teacher training about students’ need for positive relationships, fair treatment, and procedural justice. School-Wide Positive and Restorative Discipline recently was piloted in a high school that had been implementing SWPBIS with fidelity, yet had persistent racial disparities in discipline (Vincent et al., 2016). Through online materials and workshops, teachers learned about RJ/RP concepts (e.g., social capital, procedural justice, restoring relationships), and building community through active listening, classroom circles, and delivery of behavior-specific affective statements. Examining end-of-year discipline referral rates, Vincent et al. (2016) reported reductions in schoolwide referrals and racial disparities relative to the year prior.

CONCLUSION

We see the 10 principles in the Framework for Increasing Equity in School Discipline as important considerations for parents, students, educators, and support personnel who wish to shift disciplinary conflicts and consequences toward a more positive school climate. For researchers, the 10 principles are launching points from which to consider the possible “mechanisms of action” in current reform initiatives. Researchers might examine whether select principles from the Framework mediate the program impacts on reducing discipline gaps. In other words, it will be informative to know if a program’s success is explained by its inclusion of one or more of the principles (e.g., increasing bias awareness or access to academic rigor).

As of yet, there is insufficient empirical evidence to indicate which combination of the 10 principles from the Framework should be implemented together, or which principles might be prioritized over others to reduce gender and race disparities in school discipline. Similarly, it is unknown whether principles from the multiple levels of the school ecology combine in a synergistic manner or whether addressing one level would “ripple out” and affect another level of the ecology. For example, does increasing awareness of bias (intrapersonal level) lead to change at the interpersonal level or at the systems level whereby punitive treatment of marginalized students is reduced through changes in disciplinary practices and policies?

As relates to culturally conscious implementation of the principles, it is not yet clear what level of attention to issues of gender, race, class, culture, power, and privilege will be necessary to effectively close discipline gaps. Research on both positive behavior supports (Vincent et al., 2016) and restorative justice (Gregory & Clawson, 2016; Winn, 2016) has begun to explore the extent to which explicit, culturally conscious modifications to standard models of those interventions are likely to have an impact on discipline gaps. Moreover, it will be essential to identify the best ways to undertake culturally conscious implementation given the research that shows diversity-related initiatives do not necessarily lead to anticipated changes in attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors (e.g., Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016).
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INTRODUCTION

Marzano and Marzano's (2003) meta-analytic study suggests that classroom management is the single variable with the largest impact on student achievement. Why is that? Shouldn't the quality of math or language arts instruction make the biggest difference in terms of achievement? The most obvious reason for this influence is that effective classroom management sets the stage for learning. Without it, classrooms are disorganized and chaotic, and very little academic learning can happen. Less obvious is that a teacher's classroom management practices are socializing influences on students. They communicate—subtly and not-so-subtly—messages about social norms and emotional behavior. Whether teachers are aware of it or not, students are constantly developing social and emotional skills (both good and bad) through modeling, experimentation, and reinforcement. Teachers' activities in the broad category called classroom management can help students to develop healthy habits. However, they can also unintentionally encourage the learning of poor social and emotional skills. This chapter presents guidelines for integrating proactive social and emotional learning (SEL) into classroom management so that both are effective because, ultimately, they are mutually dependent and inseparable.

A Student-Centered Goal for Classroom Management

This chapter defines classroom management as all of the teacher's practices related to establishing the physical and social environment of the classroom, regulating routines and daily activities, and preventing and correcting problems. Nearly everything a teacher does, aside from communicating the content of the academic curriculum, is part of classroom management. Indeed, even the mode of instruction (e.g., frontal lecturing, worksheets, creative groupwork projects) is a component of classroom management.
To evaluate whether any particular techniques or approaches are effective, one must first consider the goals of classroom management that these practices are meant to achieve. The traditional goal of classroom management has been for the teacher to maintain and enforce discipline so that academic instruction can proceed without distractions. This “control” goal of classroom management is an important, probably necessary, condition for a classroom to function effectively. However, this goal is teacher- and instruction-centered, not student-centered. It does not take into account that some discipline strategies may maintain control but may not foster learning. We define learning broadly here. Schools are increasingly focused on social and emotional learning, as well as academic learning. Therefore, we propose a more holistic and student-centered goal for classroom management: to create a classroom environment that fosters students’ learning of academic, social, and emotional skills and the ability to put them to positive use in the world around them. While order is necessary for this goal, it is not sufficient. Classroom management strategies must both maintain order and foster learning.

Self-Control and Self-Discipline

There are two ways to achieve order in a classroom: by external control (i.e., control exerted by the teacher) and by internal control (i.e., students’ self-control). If both potentially maintain order, then one must ask which is more likely to foster learning. Schools have traditionally relied on external control because of the speed and convenience of this approach. However, numerous classroom management theorists and researchers have attempted to differentiate between management models that stress external control or obedience, on the one hand, and self-control, self-discipline, and responsibility, on the other (e.g., Bear, 2005; Brophy, 1999; Curwin & Mendler, 1988; Dreikurs, 1968; Freiberg, 1999b; Glasser, 1992; Gordon, 1974, 2003; Kohn, 1996; Weinstein, 1999). Naturally, most people who write on this topic advocate an emphasis on developing students’ self-control over relying on short-term external control techniques.

Having socially responsible citizens—citizens who are self-disciplined and who require minimal external regulation—is of critical importance to our society. Obviously, self-discipline also is critically important, especially to teachers and students, because it reduces discipline problems in the classroom—problems that impact by disrupting learning and demand considerable time and effort from the teacher. Perhaps less obvious is that self-discipline also promotes (1) positive relations with others and a positive school climate, (2) academic achievement, and (3) self-worth and emotional well-being. (Bear, 2005, p. 12)

Educators have long ruminated over how to foster the development of self-control and the internalization of society’s values and attitudes so that prosocial behaviors are internally motivated. “For several centuries American educators have questioned if external control is a wise and effective means of developing internal control of behavior” because consistent socially acceptable behavior only “in the absence [italics added] of external monitors, sanctions, and rewards is the hallmark of self-discipline” (Bear, 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, the “emphasis on compliance does not fit well with current emphases on learning through the social construction of knowledge and on helping students to become more autonomous and self-regulated learners” (Brophy, 1999, p. 51). To put it in SEL terms, self-control is unlikely to develop, and self-regulated learning is unlikely to be inspired, in environments characterized by little opportunity for students to learn and practice self-discipline. Therefore, classroom management based primarily on external control may maintain order, but it fails our goal for classroom management: to promote students’ learning of academic, social, and emotional skills and the ability to put them to positive use in the world around them.
Emotional Competence

SEL theory makes an important contribution to the goal of promoting self-control and self-discipline by stressing the primacy of emotional competence. "Emotional competence is the demonstration of self-efficacy in emotion-eliciting social transactions. Self-efficacy is used here to mean that the individual believes that he or she has the capacity and skills to achieve a desired outcome" (Saarni, 2000, p. 68, emphasis in the original). According to Saarni, based on this theory, self-control involves the following steps: The person's problem or dilemma (a) triggers an automatic emotional response and (b) brings previously-learned knowledge about emotions and social relations into consciousness. This knowledge helps the person (c) decide how to regulate the emotions and thereby negotiate the social exchange in line with his or her moral commitments. This process involves a number of skills, such as awareness of one's own emotions and the emotions of others and the ability to put those emotions into words (as well as to have and to know one's moral commitments, a topic beyond the scope of this chapter). It also requires empathy for others and the ability to cope with negative emotions through self-regulation (i.e., reducing the intensity or duration of the emotion when desired) or using the emotion to help achieve a goal (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

For example, if someone tells a sixth-grade girl that her friends have been spreading rumors about her, her ability to exert self-control relies on her emotional competence. If she does not attend to her emotional reaction or the emotions of her friends, then she may react in an unacceptable way (e.g., spreading counter-rumors, physically attacking) before finding out more information. If she does attend to her emotions and label them (e.g., anger, hurt, puzzlement), she may be able to regulate them until she finds out more information and decides on a plan. That gives her an opportunity to evaluate the source of the disclosure and speak to her friends in a calm way to see if they have a benign explanation. Based on her conclusions to such inquiries, she can identify her emotions and use them to choose a course of action that fits within her sense of morality. For example, instead of starting a fight with her friends and getting in trouble, she may choose to suspend or end the friendships and channel her emotional energy towards strengthening her other relationships.

The inability to identify and manage one's emotions results in being controlled by others. Therefore, with the goal of self-control, SEL makes monitoring emotions the first step in solving problems (see Elias & Tobias, 1996). This is one example of the kind of insights that the emerging field of SEL can bring to the field of classroom management.

The main question of this chapter is: What types of classroom management techniques maintain order while also fostering academic, social, and emotional learning—including self-control? The tension between maintaining order in the classroom and promoting academic, social, and emotional learning can be significant. For example, although well-managed cooperative learning promotes social development while increasing motivation for academic learning, many teachers are reluctant to use it because of the possibility of losing control, particularly in overcrowded classrooms (Weinstein & Mignano, 2003). All approaches to classroom management must carefully balance the ideal with the practical, and this chapter is no exception. We believe that the research on social and emotional learning can shed a unique light on resolving this tension.

The next section defines social and emotional learning and reviews a few sample studies that demonstrate its impact on social, emotional, and behavioral development, as well as specific goals that schools are evaluated on, such as academic achievement and drug and violence prevention. The following section describes how social and emotional research can help to improve the practice and study of classroom management. To that end, we recommend four action steps that, together, form a system that harmonizes the best of classroom management and social and emotional learning.
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of gaining competencies and intrinsic motivation for emotional self-awareness and self-regulation; safe and responsible behavior; and assertive, empathic, and skillful social interaction. SEL skills include identifying feelings in oneself and others, managing one’s emotions, being responsible for one’s actions and commitments, showing empathy and respect, communicating effectively, and many other challenging but necessary skills for functioning adaptively in a free society (Elias, 2003; Elias et al., 1997). Please see Appendix A for a more complete list of essential SEL skills, which was developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Elias, 2003).

It was once thought that social and emotional skills were learned strictly by experience and that they had no place in the curriculum. Math can also be learned by experience, but it is doubtful that students would “naturally” learn math with the same level of sophistication as they do with years of instruction and practice. The same is true of social and emotional skills. Numerous studies have demonstrated that social and emotional skills can be taught and that students who learn them in school have better outcomes in terms of reduced psychopathology, better peer and adult relationships, increased academic achievement, and many other benefits (Elias, 2003; Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001).

Research on the effectiveness of teaching social and emotional skills is continually expanding. Rather than cite studies that invariably find a positive correlational link between social and emotional skills, on the one hand, and prosocial behavior, on the other, we primarily refer to studies of SEL interventions that use methodology to demonstrate a causal relationship between teaching social and emotional skills and positive outcomes. These studies directly support the hypothesis that proactively teaching social and emotional skills can influence children’s behavior, social-emotional development, relationship to school, and academic trajectory.

Though SEL programs can have these positive outcomes, not all of them do. There has been a recent proliferation of programs and curricula marketed to promote character and SEL in schools. The quality of these packaged programs varies tremendously. Unfortunately, many of the curricula make cardinal errors by confusing knowledge of good character constructs with real-life responsible behavior. “While it is nice that students can tell us what they need to do to act responsibly, it is more important that they actually behave in responsible ways. In a phrase, ‘Talk is cheap; behavior is golden’” (Knoff, 2003, p. 39, emphasis in the original). Knoff suggests that, instead of introducing good character constructs to early elementary students who do not possess the cognitive ability to understand them yet, we should focus on responsible behaviors and return to the constructs defined by those behaviors when the students are ready. The ultimate test of any character education or SEL initiative is whether students can flexibly adapt the skills to different real-world situations, settings, and problems. Because of these challenges in creating an effective SEL program, only a handful of them have been empirically supported. (For a more complete review of the many programs available and their respective research standings, please see CASEL, 2003, and Greenberg et al., 2001.)

The following section gives brief descriptions of five of the best-studied programs and the samples they were studied with. Outcomes for all of the programs are summarized together in the following section, by category. This allows the reader to get an aggregated picture of what benefits can be obtained from SEL programs, in general, rather than just one in particular.

SEL Program Descriptions

Child Development Project

The Child Development Project (CDP), perhaps the most extensively described and studied SEL program, was created by the Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, California. Its
effectiveness has been researched since the late 1980s. The intervention includes five elements: (1) cooperative learning (a specific form of groupwork); (2) "developmental discipline"; (3) reading instruction that focuses on social and emotional dimensions of literature; (4) schoolwide community building; and (5) activities to promote family-school bonds. Developmental discipline, as defined by CDP, promotes the internalization of prosocial norms, values, and skills, such as self-control, by involving students in rule setting and decision making. Rewards and punishments are avoided in favor of nonpunitive control techniques to teach students that positive behavior should be intrinsically motivated. Much of the day-to-day implementation of CDP surrounds a literature-based language arts curriculum that helps the students understand and relate to prosocial values and actions in everyday life. The power of this medium is described by Schaps and Solomon (1990):

... Books show concretely and vividly how such values as fairness and kindness make the world a better place. Still others reveal the inner lives of people from other cultures, ages, and circumstances as they deal with universal issues and concerns—they help children to empathize with people who are both like them and not like them and to see commonalities that underly diversity. (p. 40)

In the first study, conducted in the 1980s, CDP was implemented school-wide in three elementary schools with three comparable schools serving as controls. All schools were in one middle to upper-middle class community. The intervention lasted five years, with students who began in kindergarten participating in all five years by the time they reached fourth grade (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, Solomon, & Schaps, 1989; Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, & Solomon, 1991).

Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, and Lewis (2000) reported the most extensive study of CDP to date, which involved 12 intervention schools and 12 matching control schools in six districts across the United States with widely varying demographics. Schools were in large cities, small cities, and suburbs; were in both affluent and poor communities; were dominated by different racial groups or none at all; and had a variety of past achievement levels. Five of the 12 program schools were judged by blind raters as having significant levels of implementation over the three-year period of this study. Outcome measures are reported for those five schools.

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma (1995) studied another SEL program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), which is a social problem solving curriculum that focuses on affective, behavioral, cognitive, dynamic, and developmental components of social and emotional learning. Three skills are stressed: self-control, emotional awareness and understanding, and social problem solving. The 286 participants in this study were second- and third-graders from four schools in the Seattle area. Two-thirds were from traditional classrooms and one-third were from special education classrooms. The sample matched the ethnic diversity of the Seattle area except that there was an underrepresentation of Asian Americans (58% Caucasians, 32% African American, 4% Asian American).

I Can Problem Solve (ICPS)

I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) was one of the first social problem solving curricula that provided numerous lessons for implementation in schools. Its goals are to prevent high-risk and antisocial behaviors by teaching children to solve everyday problems, beginning in preschool. It does this by teaching students four sets of skills: alternative solution skills, consequential thinking, social perspective taking, and means-ends or sequential thinking (Shure & Glaser, 2001). The curriculum relies heavily on teaching concepts through vocabulary and then associating that vocabulary with theoretical problem solving situations. However, early research
on ICPS suggested that “the curriculum has an impact on behavior only if the teachers help children apply in real life the skills practiced in fictitious situations” (Shure & Glaser, p. 128). When students confront problems in real life, teachers use “ICPS dialoguing” and other forms of communication that rely more heavily on asking than telling the child what to do. That way, ICPS is both integrated into the planned curriculum as well as used to respond to problems in the classroom.

**Skills, Opportunities, And Recognition (SOAR)**

Skills, Opportunities, And Recognition (SOAR), also known as the Seattle Social Development Project, was implemented for six years in first through sixth grades in 18 schools serving high-crime areas in Seattle, Washington. Because of mandatory busing, schools were heterogeneous with respect to ethnicity. About 44% of the sample was Caucasian, 26% Africa American, and 22% Asian American. Over 56% of the sample could be defined as “poor,” based on participation in the National School Lunch/School Breakfast Program. SOAR’s goal was to create a community of learners, bonded to school and family, through improved instructional practices and increased family involvement. The intervention included three components: (1) five days of in-service training for teachers in intervention classrooms each year covering proactive classroom management, interactive teaching, and cooperative learning; (2) training for first grade teachers in a cognitive and social skills program that teaches children to problem solve in social situations; and (3) voluntary parent training classes that focused on behavior management, helping children succeed in school, and preventing drug use. In addition, sixth graders received four hours of training in recognizing and resisting social influences to engage in risky behavior, such as experimenting with drugs. The study reported here is not from the program period. It was done as a follow up with 598 of the participating students (from all of the intervention and control conditions) at age 18, six years after the intervention ended (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999).

**Social Decision Making / Social Problem Solving Curriculum (SDM/SPS)**

The longitudinal impact of SEL was also studied by Elias, Gara, Schuyler, Branden-Muller, and Sayette (1991). They studied the Social Decision Making / Social Problem Solving (SDM/SPS) curriculum (Elias & Tobias, 1996), which has the goal of promoting “social competence by focusing on critical social decision-making, self-control, group participation, and social awareness skills” (Elias et al., 1991, p. 409). Students who had participated in the curriculum for two years—in fourth and fifth grades—were studied five or six years later, even though there was no formal continuation of the program or “booster” in the intervening years. All of the students were from one predominantly white, multiethnic, working-class community of 15,000 in central New Jersey and were divided into experimental and control groups based on whether their elementary schools participated in the program during the original intervention period.

How SEL Benefits Schools: SEL Program Outcomes

**SEL Improves Social and Emotional Skills**

Since the primary goal of all SEL programs is to increase students’ social and emotional skills, it is no surprise that these studies found effects in this area. Children in the CDP intervention schools developed more social and emotional competencies than controls (Battistich et al., 1989; Battistich et al., 1991). Greenberg and his colleagues (1995) found that PATHS
was effective with both unclassified and special education populations in improving students' ability to identify feelings, belief that they can hide and manage their feelings, and recognition of other people's feelings, three important social and emotional skills. Students trained in kindergarten and first grade by their teachers still had better ICPS skills than controls three years later. ICPS also enhanced social and emotional development in special needs students, including those with AD/HD and Asperger's (Shure & Glaser, 2001). In the longitudinal study of SDM/SPS, experimental girls had significantly higher overall social-competence scores than controls, and both boys and girls in the experimental condition showed higher self-efficacy than controls (Elias et al., 1991).

**SEL Fosters a Stronger School Community**

Implementing SEL throughout a school reliably leads to perceptions of a more caring environment and more student bonding to the school. CDP, in particular, focuses on this goal, and studies have shown that it leads to a strong sense of community. Over three years of implementation in the second CDP study, students in the intervention schools reported an increased sense of the schools as communities and more liking for their schools. Most of the other behavioral and academic effects were mediated, as predicted, by the sense of the school as a community (Solomon et al., 2000). Similarly, students who participated in the full SOAR intervention through sixth grade had significantly higher ratings of bonding to their schools (Hawkins et al., 1999).

**SEL Increases Prosocial Behavior**

Schools are always looking for ways to improve student behavior. The effective development of students' SEL skills implies, by definition, that students improve their social skills, self-control, and emotion regulation. SEL's positive, preventive, successful, and long-lasting approach to improving student behavior may be reason enough for schools to adopt these practices. Some evidence of these effects is presented below.

In the first CDP study, students in intervention schools consistently demonstrated more spontaneous prosocial behavior and superior social problem solving skills than controls, especially in response to peer instigations of aggression. This involved better perspective-taking and greater ability to identify one's own situation and someone else's needs, to consider the consequences of various options, and to choose more prosocial and cooperative strategies. The intervention group also engaged in more spontaneous prosocial behavior (e.g., helpfulness, cooperation, and encouragement) and endorsed democratic values more frequently, including assertion responsibility, equality of representation and participation, and willingness to compromise. They were also more likely to act ethically and altruistically (Battistich et al., 1989; Battistich et al., 1991). Many effects of the elementary school intervention persisted through middle school, even after the intervention ended. Students who came from elementary schools that implemented CDP outperformed their peers on teacher ratings of behavior and self-reported misbehavior (Schaps, 2003). In the larger CDP study, students in the five high-implementation schools showed higher prosocial motivation, more democratic values, greater conflict resolution skills, and more concern for others. Effect sizes ranged from small to moderate. There were no significant effects related to observer-rated student behavior in that study (Solomon et al., 2000).

ICPS training with low-income African American four- and five-year-olds resulted in reduced impulsive and inhibited behaviors, increased sharing and caring behaviors, and some protective effects from developing behavior problems in kindergarten or first grade (Shure & Glaser, 2001). In an evaluation of ICPS in a group equally divided between Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian kindergarteners, trained students were rated as having reduced
impulsive and inhibited behaviors and increased peer acceptance, concern for others, and classroom initiative. These findings were maintained through a six-month follow-up (Shure & Glaser, 2001).

Research on PATHS found that it reduced aggression and hyperactive-disruptive behavior, improved behaviors related to emotional adjustment, reduced impulsivity, and raised social competence (CASEL, 2003). Not all outcome measures associated with PATHS have shown significant or strong effect sizes (e.g., Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999), but it does seem to promote at least a modest improvement in children’s behavior. Years after the program ended, high school students who participated in SOAR in elementary school had better in-school behavior than their peers according to some measures (Hawkins et al., 1999).

**SEL Impacts Student Health and Risk-Taking Behavior**

The benefits of SEL are not limited to behavioral self-control and self-discipline. SEL programs create a framework within which to teach about serious health-related issues. For example, most of the programs cited here have a problem-solving component. If the problem-solving system is taught early and reinforced week after week, year after year, there is good reason to believe that students can become proficient at solving all kinds of day-to-day problems ranging in difficulty from getting their homework done to avoiding fights on the playground. When these students face more serious challenges, such as substance use, serious violence, bullying, and sexual risk taking, the problem-solving skills practiced in more banal circumstances will be available to them. These deeply ingrained skills may help them to make mature decisions and resist temptation and peer pressure. Teachers can help to assure this synergy by teaching about these risky behaviors using the problem-solving framework employed throughout the school. Students can discuss and rehearse their responses to these dangers based on a well-developed system of responsible decision making. Research on ICPS directly supports this assumption. ICPS has been found to decrease depression and impulsivity, and the social and emotional gains of ICPS with AD/HD children have been maintained at least three years with some showing further long-term gains (Shure & Glaser, 2001).

Longitudinal studies also demonstrate the points just made. Roughly six years after each intervention had ended, both SOAR and SDM/SPS students showed gains in health and risk-taking behaviors when compared with fellow high school students who had not participated in the intervention. SOAR students had significantly lower rates of violence, heavy drinking, and sexual behavior in high school, though other measures, including drug use, did not reach significance (Hawkins et al., 1999). Students in the experimental condition of SDM/SPS, as compared to controls, showed significantly lower rates of alcohol use, vandalism, hitting or threatening peers or parents, attacking others with intent to injure, buying or providing alcohol for someone else, and using tobacco products. Some effects of the intervention, such as reduced buying of or providing of alcohol, were stronger in boys. Others, like less use of tobacco, were stronger for girls. Analyses of the psychopathology indexes on the Youth Self Report (YSR) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987) showed that experimental boys had significantly fewer symptoms of depression and self-destructive or identity problems than controls (Elías et al., 1991). Although many of the effect sizes were small or moderate, this study and Hawkins et al. (1999) both support the assumption that building social skills in elementary school has immediate benefits, such as reductions in problem behaviors, and that those benefits last many years after the SEL intervention is over, at least into high school, and generalize to include major risk-taking behavior, such as substance use and violence. This is in contrast to the lack of long-term evidence for conventional drug and violence prevention programs that are not linked to a broader skill-building curriculum.
SEL Improves Academic Achievement

Though health- and behavior-related issues are high on schools’ agendas, the primary goal of the American education system is students’ academic development. This foundational principle has only been reinforced in the past few years since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act and the prevalence of high-stakes testing. So, it is important to note that SEL skill-building improves academic achievement. On the surface, this may not seem to be a major discovery. SEL skills include self-control and other skills that are necessary for a student to take responsibility for his or her schoolwork, so it is not surprising that SEL is related to academic achievement. However, the magnitude of the relationship—and its apparent independence of IQ and other academically oriented measures—demonstrates that SEL is one of the most important determinants of academic achievement.

Some SEL programs have already shown that they can impact academic achievement, although the outcomes are quite variable from program to program and study to study. One encouraging example is SDM/SPS. SDM/SPS skills are essential to doing academics effectively because, for example, they enable students to understand and follow directions, to examine texts patiently to extract information, to delay gratification to focus on academic tasks without being sidetracked, to participate in cooperative learning groups, and to complete homework and projects in an organized way (Elias, 2004). This was demonstrated in a study of fourth- and fifth-graders in one suburban, working-class community who were part of an SDM/SPS study; their grades in language arts and social studies showed improvement in the third and fourth marking periods as compared with the first marking period, with the highest and most consistent improvements corresponding to the students who received the complete—as opposed to the partial—intervention. (Grades in science and math did not rise, which was consistent with the hypothesis and implied that the effects in language arts and social studies were not due to grade inflation.) In addition to SEL skills, such as self-control and emotional regulation, that help students stay focused on and motivated to do their schoolwork, the problem-solving paradigm of SDM/SPS helped students relate to literature characters more deeply and understand history as a series of individuals and groups “problem-solving.” This synergy between academics and SEL improved students’ skills in both domains (Elias, 2004). Elias and his colleagues (1991) found small, but significant, positive effects of SDM/SPS on achievement five or six years after the intervention was completed.

CDP studies have also reported academic outcomes. Even after the intervention ended, students who came from elementary schools that implemented CDP outperformed their peers on academic achievement measures (i.e., grade-point average and standardized test scores) in middle school (Schaps, 2003). The larger study of CDP showed that it increased intrinsic academic motivation and the frequency of reading of self-chosen books. Only two schools in one district showed improvements in academic achievement, though this was confounded by a state-wide testing mandate in those schools that was very consistent with the intervention (Solomon et al., 2000). ICPS has resulted in higher standardized achievement test scores with students who began training in both kindergarten and fifth grade (Shure & Glaser, 2001). Students who participated in SOAR and SDM/SPS also showed better academic outcomes on some measures when compared with controls (Hawkins et al., 1999; Elias et al., 1991).

Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, and Zimbardo (2000) reported a study that, though not on an SEL program, is very important to understanding the magnitude of the relationship between social skills and academic achievement and could bolster the cases of educators who must justify the expenditure of time and resources on SEL in a back-to-basics and high-stakes academic testing environment. The study was longitudinal, tracking four cohorts of Italian third-graders through eighth grade. Prosocial behavior in third grade was strongly
related to social preference in eighth grade, accounting for 37% of variance, which supports the long-term importance of social skills for socialization. However, the effects of prosocial behavior were nearly as pronounced when measuring academic achievement. Prosocial behavior in third grade accounted for 35% of the variance in academic achievement in eighth grade. Furthermore, a 100-participant subsample of this study received academic measures in both third and eighth grades. Surprisingly, achievement in third grade was unrelated to achievement in eighth. In this study, prosocial behavior in third grade was the best predictor of achievement in eighth grade. Mitchell, Elias, Labouvie, and Haynes (2004) had similar results, predicting third-grade achievement most strongly from social competence in second grade in an urban sample. If these findings are verified by further study and replication, it could lead to the conclusion that SEL skill-building is an essential factor in reaching schools’ academic goals and, therefore, justifies the expenditure of very limited class time and scarce financial and professional resources.

Wentzel (1993) tried to analyze the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between prosocial and responsible behavior on the one hand and academic outcomes on the other. Three mechanisms were suggested: (1) Positive social conduct is related to good academic behaviors, which, in turn, are related to learning and intelligence; (2) positive social conduct leads to teacher preference and support, which lead to learning and other good outcomes; and (3) positive social conduct and responsibility are related to achievement without any mediating factors.

To test these mechanisms, Wentzel (1993) conducted a study of 423 sixth- and seventh-graders and 11 teachers from one school in which she measured students’ pro- and antisocial behavior (as rated by self, peers, and teachers), academic achievement (average of grades across different classes), teacher ratings of academically relevant behavior, and teacher preferences. The middle school was in a working-class community in the Midwest; the sample was ethnically diverse (68% Caucasian, 23% African American, 5% Hispanic). Prosocial and antisocial behavior were both highly correlated with GPA (in opposite directions), each accounting for nearly 30% of the variance. When controlling for personal variables, academic behavior, and teacher preferences, pro- and antisocial behavior were still significantly related to achievement, though the effect sizes were considerably smaller (r’s = .17 and -.18). The other independent predictors of academic achievement were academic behavior, IQ, and family structure, but not teacher preferences. Overall, Wentzel’s model accounted for 72% of the variance. Pro- and antisocial behavior accounted for about 4% of unique variance in GPA. This supports Wentzel’s first hypothesized mechanism: Social conduct primarily influences academic achievement through its relationship with academically oriented behavior.

Based on this study, Wentzel (1993) argued that “… educators and researchers need to go beyond direct, content-based instruction to understand learning and performance in the classroom” (p. 363). Educators and researchers need to look at motivation, self-regulatory processes, and other social competencies. Finally, Wentzel concluded from the data that SEL should be a greater focus of schools. “Given that prosocial behavior is a positive, independent predictor of both students’ grades and standardized test scores, a stronger emphasis on the development of cooperative, sharing, and helpful behavior might be warranted” (p. 363).

The empirical evidence in support of SEL approaches certainly justify their use by educators toward the goals of building students’ capacity to learn and to engage effectively in the world with sound character. However, this still-emerging literature contains many different models and components. In the following section, we attempt to distill the literature to assist educators in drawing clear guidelines for integrating SEL principles and practices with effective classroom management.
INTEGRATING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING 
AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The research on SEL reinforces the need for classroom management practices that support the development of students’ academic, social, and emotional skills, or, at the very least, do not conflict with this cardinal goal of education. SEL instruction and classroom management are overlapping tasks, and classroom management practices can have a significant impact (positive or negative) on students’ social and emotional development. This implies a new paradigm for research on and assessment of classroom management techniques and programs. Evaluations of classroom management should move beyond relying solely on short-term measurements of classroom behavior and misbehavior. Many other questions should be asked, including: Is the management program effective in improving behavior over the long term? Is behavior improving outside of the target classroom—in other areas of the school and outside of school? Have self-control and personal effort attributions increased? Are students taking more responsibility for their actions and problem solving independently? Are grades and test scores rising? Is the school a warmer, more comfortable community for all of its stakeholders, especially students? Are measures of academic, social, and emotional learning all improving? These goals are far more difficult to attain and to measure than “Are the students sitting quietly and not disrupting?” They are also far more meaningful.

This section describes four areas of teacher action that characterize an integration of quality classroom management and SEL:

Action 1: Teach SEL skills
Action 2: Build caring relationships
Action 3: Set firm and fair boundaries
Action 4: Share responsibility with students

Please note that these categories and the specific skills and techniques included in each overlap and are mutually dependent. Furthermore, Actions 2–4 could all be considered teaching SEL skills and have been included as such in SEL skill-building curricula. Similarly, Action 1 is an integral part of the best classroom management programs. Nevertheless, each of these actions has a distinct role in managing classrooms effectively and is, we think, a useful way to conceptualize how SEL and classroom management are best integrated. Within each Action section, the SEL skills most relevant and specific to classroom functioning are presented. Methods of teaching those skills taken from SDM/SPS will serve as examples of practical SEL approaches and terminology. Other SEL skills from Appendix A that do not have immediate application to management will not receive the same treatment here.

Action 1: Teach SEL Skills

The first step in bringing SEL to the classroom is to plan how one will incorporate explicit SEL skill building into the curriculum and classroom management agenda. This selection process should come first because, based on the SEL program chosen, a full-scale preventive classroom management plan can then be designed to match the tone, methodology, and language of the SEL program. The specifics of how one carries out Actions 2–4 should rely heavily on and reinforce the core skills being taught during SEL instruction. For example, if the SEL program teaches a problem-solving technique, the teacher should use the same one to address day-to-day problems that arise in the classroom. The SEL skill-building program chosen should be used as a framework upon which the other elements are linked and built, making one’s approach more coherent and effective.
Skills necessary for optimal functioning in the classroom can and must be taught, modeled, and practiced proactively. If they are not addressed proactively, they constitute what has been called the “hidden curriculum” because social skills are taught, modeled, and reinforced all the time, even when the teacher is not deliberately teaching them. Unfortunately, students do not always learn adaptive and prosocial versions of these vital skills when they are taught only by experience (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). This situation is further compounded by the array of media messages children receive that urge them to act in ways that support neither academic excellence nor self-control (Comer, 2003).

Before, during, and after teaching individual social skills, teachers must also work to “change values and basic assumptions, particularly about the value of prosocial rather than aggressive and antisocial behaviors in problem situations” (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995, p. xi). In other words, social skills instruction is a two-component process. First, teachers help students to develop specific skills and competencies to enable students to act in prosocial ways. Second, teachers must work over the long term to foster motivation for responsible behavior and ethical growth, which bridge the gap between students’ learning social and emotional skills and choosing to apply them. At first, students will not use their newly acquired skills spontaneously in difficult situations. Repetition, cuing, and coaching are necessary to transform discrete skills into socially competent and responsible behavior across many different situations (Elia et al., 1997). The goal is for students to be able to act responsibly and ethically without cuing or any kind of external reinforcement. These are the kinds of citizens that any democracy hopes for.

**The Four Phases of Social-Emotional Skill Instruction**

Cartledge and Milburn (1995) break down the process of teaching social and emotional skills into three phases: (1) instruction, (2) skill performance and feedback, and (3) practice and generalization. In addition, SEL emphasizes that cuing and reminding in real-life situations constitute a necessary fourth phase as children transform the skills into lifelong habits (Shure & Glaser, 2001). Evaluation of students’ competence with the specific behaviors should occur before, during, and after this sequence to measure the effectiveness of instruction. This section will focus on the four phases of social-emotional skill instruction but not on evaluation and measurement. (For more information on those, see CASEL, 2003, which contains guidelines for evaluation as well as links to evaluation tools used by a number of SEL programs.)

The instruction phase begins with providing a rationale for learning and performing the SEL skill being taught. This is best done by challenging the students to analyze the value of the skill or even to identify the behavior themselves by figuring out the best response to a hypothetical scenario. Once the value of the skill has been addressed, it is important to break down the skill into its component behaviors (Elia & Tobias, 1996). Again, students should participate in doing this, which helps them to learn the components in their own “language.” Finally, students are presented with a model that most clearly communicates the skill. The model could be a character in literature, an actor on a videotape, a peer who role-plays the skill in person, and so on (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995).

The second phase of teaching SEL skills is skill performance and feedback. Like seatwork during a lesson, guided rehearsal gives the students an opportunity to perform the focal skill individually for the first time in a secure environment. Rehearsal can be covert (i.e., cognitive or imaginal), verbal, or physical. Of course, physical performance of the skill, if possible, is superior to either thinking or talking about it. Feedback is provided when physical or verbal performance is done to correct mistakes, address problems, and recognize when the skill is being done properly. Feedback can be verbal, reinforcement-based, or self-evaluative (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). Appendix B is a sample lesson plan that gives classroom-based examples of Phases 1 and 2.
The third phase of teaching social-emotional skills is practice. As with any other skill taught in a classroom, practice—even overlearning—is necessary to maintain the behavior. In addition to practice for maintenance, generalization to different real-world situations is a critical part of teaching social-emotional skills. There are a number of ways to encourage generalization; Cartledge and Milburn (1995) identify six strategies based on behavioral and cognitive research:

1. Training in a variety of settings, particularly settings that match “target” situations for the behavior, is very helpful to generalization.
2. Practice should be done in real life or, if that is not practical, under conditions that approximate real life as much as possible.
3. Training should occur with different people to show consistency across social situations. For the best outcomes, all school personnel should model and reinforce social skills consistently and use the same language to refer to them. This requires that school-wide policies concerning rules and behavior be established. To generalize beyond school, parents and community members should use the same social skill language. Peers can also be a powerful force in reinforcing school- or community-wide SEL skills.
4. As an extension of the previous point, care should be taken to keep training mediators, such as language and expectations, consistent across situations.
5. Contingencies of reinforcement for SEL behaviors should remain consistent across different settings, both in school and, if possible, out of school. External reinforcement is limited in its effectiveness, however. If it is used, it should be tapered to encourage generalization to contexts in which reinforcement is unavailable.
6. Students should be encouraged to develop self-management for their social behaviors. This is the highest level of creating generalization and the most effective in the long term. It occurs through self-monitoring via charts, worksheets, diaries, and reflective journals. If students learn to value the skills, adopt reasonable standards for application, self-monitor, self-evaluate, and self-reinforce, then they have reached an admirable level of skill independence and behavioral competence. Ultimately, the goal of social-emotional skill-building is to make the transition from external control and reinforcement to internal motivation, responsibility, and self-control. This is, perhaps, the most valuable principle that the field of classroom management can learn from SEL.

The fourth and final phase of teaching social-emotional skills is cuing and reminding. While students who have reached the level of self-management of their social behaviors may not need cuing and reminding, the vast majority of students do need them, especially when they first learn new skills. Almost no students remember when and how to apply new skills until they’ve had many opportunities to practice them in the real world. Cuing can take many forms, all of which should be positive, brief, private, and designed to encourage rather than criticize the child. Verbal cues are best done in very short phrases that are as private and encouraging as possible. It can be helpful to have a code word or acronym for a particular skill.

Let’s take an example of an SEL skill from the SDM/SPS curriculum that directly applies to classroom management. If a student is not paying attention to a peer who is speaking, a teacher might be tempted to shout from across the room: “Kim, stop fiddling around with the papers in your desk. Sit up straight, turn and look at Michael, and listen to what he’s trying to say.” This might stop her from fiddling with the papers, but it would likely make Kim feel embarrassed and discouraged and, because of those feelings, she would probably not even hear what Michael has to say. The SDM/SPS program terms that set of listening skills, Listening Position, so the teacher could simply say: “I would like to remind everyone to use Listening Position.” If done in a positive tone of voice, it helps everyone self-monitor; those who are
in good listening positions feel pleased, and those who are not can self-correct. Either way, feelings of embarrassment or discouragement are minimized. If Kim did not hear the general statement, the teacher can walk over and ask quietly, "Kim, Listening Position, please." A need for further reminders suggests that perhaps the child does not know the skill or has a learning or attentional impairment that should be watched more closely.

Cuing can take many nonverbal forms as well. Cuing can be done with hand gestures or eye contact. Posters or murals on the walls of the classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms can serve as cues for specific skills. Signals for use in large groups, such as assemblies, are especially important. All school personnel should use the same terminology to cue the same skills in different venues, and even students can be allies in cuing their peers to perform skills in social situations. As long as the cuing is done in brief, positive, and private ways that encourage students to remember and use their skills, it can be a vital tool in promoting the transition from knowledge of skill to real-life performance. Once again, the ultimate goal is for students to exhibit self-management and for cuing to become unnecessary. Nevertheless, educators routinely underestimate the time needed before cues are faded. One should think in terms of years, not weeks, with ultimate success depending a great deal on continuity across grade levels.

Many state-of-the-art instructional practices that teachers apply to academic teaching also are required for SEL instruction. For example, SEL requires (indeed, is predicated on) student-centered learning rather than teacher-oriented instruction and should be developmentally appropriate with regard to both the choice of skills to be taught as well as methods of teaching those skills (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). SEL pedagogy is highly consistent with Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory (1985, 1993), Levine’s “A Mind at a Time” approach (2002), and McCarthy’s 4MAT instructional method (1987). Principles of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999) have also emerged as extremely important, as any single classroom almost certainly contains students with vast individual differences in social and emotional competencies based on family background; cultural differences; genetics; prior school experiences; and differences in cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and psychopathological functioning.

**Social Problem Solving**

There are three building blocks to SEL competency and responsible behavior: basic/readiness skills, problem solving, and internal motivation and self-discipline. Readiness skills include turn taking, following directions, keeping calm, communicating effectively, and reading social cues. (Please see Appendix A for an inventory of SEL skills.) Social problem solving relies upon readiness skills to choose and organize actions in almost any situation. In this way, social problem solving can be seen as the superordinate competency in the SEL skill hierarchy. Consequently, it is at the heart of all of the empirically supported SEL programs discussed previously. Internal motivation, the third building block, drives the choice to use one’s problem-solving competencies and exert self-control in a situation.

There are numerous social problem-solving paradigms. Many of them use mnemonics to help children remember the steps. Problem solving in SDM/SPS is called FIG TESP. Each letter stands for a step in the problem-solving process:

- **Feelings**—How do I feel in this situation?
- **Identify problem**—What’s the problem?
- **Goal**—What is my ultimate goal? What do I want to have happen?
- **Think**—Brainstorm at least three possible solutions to this problem.
- **Envision**—What are the likely consequences of each of my possible solutions?
- **Solution**—Choose the best solution I thought of.
- **Plan**—Plan how to carry out my solution.
- **Notice results**—After I carry out my plan, evaluate it.
Other programs’ problem-solving systems are substantially similar; the main differences are the names, the memory devices, and SDM/SPS’s strong emphasis on feelings at the beginning of the problem-solving process, a discovery of the SDM/SPS program three decades ago. Regardless of the name, social problem solving provides the framework for acting in a socially and emotionally competent way in the classroom and in life.

**Integrating SEL and Academics**

SEL instruction is particularly effective when integrated with academics rather than when treated as a separate “subject” (Elias, 2004). As described earlier, SEL skills are vital to academic learning. Integrating the two types of learning creates synergies for both. For example, when SEL skill-building is integrated into a literature lesson, the SEL skills are raised to the level of importance of core academics rather than being viewed as a “special” or “add-on” subject. SEL is also dramatized in meaningful and complex ways in literature, which improves the learning of both SEL and the literature being studied through text-to-self connections. Appendix B gives an example of how SEL gains relevance through a literature lesson and how the literature lesson is enhanced by using SEL as a paradigm for analyzing a particular passage in a read-aloud book.

Social problem solving illustrates the connection of SEL and academic instruction particularly well. In language arts, problem solving can be applied to the dilemmas faced by characters in stories. Students’ understanding of characters deepens by problem solving at exciting junctures; this brings them into the story and the authoring process. History and current events can be presented as a series of problems that various individuals and groups have attempted to solve. Students can try to figure out, based on their readings and other sources of information, what various individuals and groups involved were feeling and what their goals were. They learn the powerful impact of deficiencies in effective problem solving, empathy, and perspective-taking. As students apply social problem solving in academic areas, they enhance their own ability to problem solve in the present both individually and in groups (Elias, 2004).

As discussed previously, health and family life education provides the closest analogue to real-life problem solving because it is all about making choices about how to live. Having an established, deeply learned problem-solving paradigm in a school can be critical to framing major target issues, such as substance use, violence, and sexual risk taking. Rather than presenting each of these risky behaviors haphazardly, a specific problem-solving technique can serve as the unifying principle for confronting these decisions and making them effectively. Students who have learned over a number of years to make responsible decisions using problem solving when confronted with “smaller” conflicts will be at a great advantage in approaching these “larger” issues in a mature, self-confident, and proactive way. And seeing that problem solving is useful for even the most sensitive and consequential real-world decisions will increase the students’ value of those skills.

Teaching SEL skills, from readiness skills to problem solving, is one basic building block in classroom management, but it is not fully effective by itself. This chapter presents three additional areas of classroom management that are necessary for the integration of SEL with management. (A more comprehensive treatment of teaching social and emotional skills, along with a variety of categorizations and listings of skills, can be found in Cartledge & Milburn, 1995, or in any of the empirically supported SEL programs described here or in CASEL, 2003, or Greenberg et al., 2001).

**Action 2: Build Caring Relationships**

Building caring relationships is a tenet of SEL and is a necessary factor in fostering students’ social and emotional growth. The actions associated with developing caring relationships model
competent social skill behavior. Since children learn all the time, whether we intend to teach them or not, building caring relationships in classrooms may have at least as much influence on their development of social skills as explicit teaching. (Students should be encouraged to do as we say and as we do.) Furthermore, a caring atmosphere supports students emotionally (which, sadly, many students lack outside the classroom) and models such emotional skills as emotion identification and regulation. Building caring relationships sets the tone for SEL skillbuilding and provides the first vehicle for practice and improvement. It makes the classroom a living SEL laboratory. The importance of a caring classroom community is supported by the literature on CDP. Students’ perception of the school as a caring community is the primary goal of CDP and has been studied extensively as a mediator to other positive outcomes in SEL and classroom management practices (Battistich, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001; Battistich et al., 1991; Battistich, Solomon, & Watson, 1998; Schaps, 2003; Schaps & Solomon, 1990; Solomon et al., 2000).

In terms of classroom management, building an atmosphere of caring relationships can make all of the difference between a functional and dysfunctional classroom. The persistent demands of academic performance, complying with rules, and interacting positively with peers and teachers can be challenging for students. Developing a supportive community in the classroom helps to impart a sense of each student’s belonging, to alleviate students’ social anxieties and frustration, and to motivate students to comply with teacher requests and act prosocially with peers. Consequently, the level of respect for teachers and peers increases, negative or aggressive social behaviors are reduced, and students are more likely to comply with the rules (Elias et al., 1997). Because of this, building caring relationships is the first step in the promotion of responsible behavior and prevention of misbehavior. Setting a supportive tone for the class should be the teacher’s first task when students enter the classroom on the first day of school. It is worth noting that any early childhood educator reading this will recognize it as an essential tenet of their teaching. However, what SEL theory has brought into clearer focus is that the link of caring relationships and learning does not cease to become relevant after early childhood. Indeed, its importance continues through the adolescent years and persists into adult education contexts (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). (For a full review of research on building caring communities and classroom management, see chapter 10 in this volume.)

Relationships in a typical classroom fall into three different types: teacher-student, student-student, and the classroom community. We consider the first one separately and the latter two together. This section also touches upon the SEL skills and techniques related to effective communication, which is the primary medium for building functional relationships.

**Teacher-Student Relationships**

Building caring relationships between teachers and students is necessary for many reasons. First, when students sense that a teacher cares about them, they see the teacher as more credible and as an ally rather than a foe. This increases motivation to follow directions, to adhere to rules, and to put effort into classroom activities and academics. Just as adults who feel respected and supported in the workplace are more productive, children have those same needs and respond best in school environments that they perceive as caring and respectful. Pianta and others have demonstrated the influence of teacher-child relationships on academic success, behavior, and other important outcomes (e.g., Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; see Osterman, 2000). Weinstein and Mignano (2003) detail nine ways in which successful classroom managers express concern for students. Effective teachers are welcoming, are sensitive to students’ concerns, treat students fairly, act like real people (not just as teachers), share responsibility, minimize the use of external controls, include everyone, search for students’ strengths, and communicate effectively. To this list, we would add that teachers should also show an interest
in their students’ lives and pursuits. Many of these ten practices not only express concern for students but also are important for other action steps, a fact that highlights the integrated nature of SEL and classroom management.

Hoy and Weinstein (see chapter 8 in this volume) summarize the literature on students’ perceptions of teachers’ management practices. The studies they cite span elementary to high school and cover a wide range of cultural, racial, and socioeconomic populations. Their review points to three factors that are central to students’ appraisal of teachers. According to students, good teachers are those who develop positive relationships with their students (they care); exercise authority without being rigid, harsh, punitive, or unfair; and use creative instructional practices to “make learning fun.” These teacher practices are the preconditions for establishing a positive classroom environment. The convergence between students’ descriptions of “good” teachers and the research on effective teaching practices is noteworthy.

**Student-Student Relationships and the Classroom Community**

Peer-to-peer relationships and the classroom community are just as important as teacher-student relations in maintaining a functional classroom and promoting social and emotional growth. This may seem like an obvious statement on the surface, but Noddings (2003) points out why the classroom community is essential for shaping success in school and life. She observes that a moral life is completely relational and that character and the habits of learning are acquired through strong, nurturant, positive relationships. The classroom as a community must teach caring as the bedrock upon which other values, essential for intellectual accomplishment and ethical living, can be built: honesty, courage, responsibility. Noddings writes that in a caring community students face realities about themselves, one another, their teacher, and the world around them. This is a prerequisite to genuine learning and openness to, rather than fear of, learning. Like Sarason (1974, 1993), Noddings sees community as a response to the existential realities of loneliness, insecurity, incompleteness, and rejection. Classrooms that promote affiliation, safety, interdependence, and acceptance of differences allow students to check their existential baggage and proceed on the journey of learning. This journey can be a major source of happiness to children, but it is not an isolated trip. Rather, it is carried out in a set of relationships with classmates and other members of the school community.

Even though peer relationships do not always directly involve the teacher, the teacher is a vital force in establishing the conditions for social interaction and would benefit greatly from proactively intervening to help these relationships develop positively. SEL social skill-building practices suggest a number of ways to do this. First, the teacher can begin the year by helping students feel comfortable with each other in the classroom. This can involve group-building activities, creative opportunities to share personal experiences and interests, and establishing an ethic of teamwork and helping one another with everyday tasks and problems. Second, rather than just imposing rules about respecting peers and the teacher, teachers should involve students in deciding what rules should govern social interaction in the classroom and facilitate conversations on specific ways to show respect and caring. In the mode of SEL pedagogy, prosocial interactions should be role-played and modeled so that students learn what abstract values such as caring, inclusion, and respect look like in practice. Third, teachers should discuss, teach, and model a problem-solving approach to understanding and resolving personal dilemmas and mistakes (using personal examples in an appropriate way, if possible) to set a personal, supportive tone to the class. The SEL literature provides numerous models to accomplish these tasks (see Charney, 2002; Elias et al., 1997).

As described above, CDP focuses on building caring school-wide communities. One of the primary vehicles for reaching that goal is cooperative learning. In addition, the CDP approach urges teachers to eschew competition, perceived or real, to foster an atmosphere where no
one will end up a “loser.” This even applies to competitive or group games, which, although they can be motivating for some students, can undermine the sense of community (Schaps & Solomon, 1990). Cooperative games, in which the entire class is on the same team and competing against itself, can foster a sense of community instead of inhibiting it (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995).

Research on CDP has focused on its effectiveness in fostering community and the correlates of that goal. The benefits of such an approach are encouraging:

We also found, in general, that the greater the sense of community among the students in a program class, the more favorable their outcomes on measures of prosocial values, helping, conflict resolution skill, responses to transgression, motivation to help others learn, and intrinsic motivation.
(Schaps & Solomon, 1990, p. 40)

(Please see chapter 10 in this volume for more about CDP and its current form, Caring School Communities, and other models of building caring classroom communities.)

The capacity for empathy is the keystone to intrinsically motivated prosocial behavior. Empathy and perspective taking are vital—and often absent—in our society. The SDM/SPS skill used to teach empathy is Footsteps. The goal of Footsteps is to enable students to recognize another’s feelings and goals when in a conflict. The two participants in the exercise place cutouts in the shape of footprints on the floor across from each other. They stand in their “own feet,” and begin by stating their feelings and concerns using “I” statements. Then, they switch places, and each one acknowledges the other’s feelings and concerns and checks for accuracy with an active listening statement (e.g., “I heard you . . .”). They then return to their original places and talk about how it felt to be in the other’s “feet.” Once they understand their partner’s emotions and position, they then problem-solve together until a mutually agreeable solution is reached. This is a complex skill that requires adult modeling, specific feedback, and generous amounts of practice. Creative lessons that integrate this skill with academics (particularly literature and social studies) are especially beneficial. In keeping with the SEL skill-building pedagogy mentioned earlier, once students have learned and practiced the Footsteps technique, its use should be prompted. This takes place by adults carrying around cutouts and “dropping the feet” when they come upon students having conflicts at assemblies, or in hallways, lunchrooms, or on the playground. Students know that once the feet are dropped, they should “assume the position” required and begin the orderly process of conflict resolution under the adult’s (or trained peer mediator’s) watchful eye.

**Communication**

Developing effective communication is a challenging but vital step in building caring, functional relationships throughout the classroom. Effective teacher-to-student communication includes, but is not limited to, clarity and checking for understanding; active listening; facilitative and open-ended questioning; and saying far more positive, complimentary, and encouraging words to all students (even the challenging ones) than negative words.

Numerous SEL skills relate to communication, and there are a number of SEL skill-building methods that have particular utility in classroom functioning. “I” messages and active (reflective) listening are tried-and-true techniques. The SDM/SPS listening skill of Listening Position was mentioned above. But how does a student know when it’s time to speak instead of listen? SDM/SPS uses a system called Speaker Power, which involves passing an object from person to person to signify whose turn it is to speak. When Speaker Power is active, no one is allowed to speak without holding the object—including the teacher. The teacher gives the instructions while holding Speaker Power and then passes it to a student who is demonstrating a good
Listening Position and has raised his or her hand. After the speaker is finished, the teacher takes the object back and gives it to another student. Once the class masters this procedure, the speaker becomes responsible for choosing who gets Speaker Power next. This not only reduces outbursts and quick responses, but it forces students to pause before they speak and process what the previous person said. These are all important skills in the domains of listening and respecting others.

When it is one’s turn to speak, SDM/SPS provides simple guidelines for communicating effectively. BEST is an acronym for Body posture, Eye contact, Say nice words, and Tone of voice. Those are the four aspects of speaking that students learn to attend to. BEST emphasizes that body language and tone of voice are as important as the choice of words. Of course, all of these skills apply as much (if not more) to teachers and other adults as they do to children.

Classrooms dedicated to integrating SEL and effective classroom management should have frequent class meetings or Share Circles (the SDM/SPS version of a class meeting) to discuss problems and continually build the classroom community. Share Circles are designated times to focus entirely on the social and emotional life of the classroom through discussions, group-building activities, SEL skill development, and group problem solving. They encourage supportive relationships throughout the classroom, set a positive tone for the classroom, help children to process any emotions that they bring to school, and give students an opportunity for input into the daily running of the classroom (Charney, 2002). Providing structured opportunities to share feelings, experiences, and interests makes the classroom the personal and supportive environment that underlies caring relationships. Some programs, notably Responsive Classroom, consider this to be a central, daily feature of effective classroom management (Charney, 2002).

Action 3: Set Firm and Fair Boundaries

Discipline is probably the first thing that comes to mind when someone mentions “classroom management.” Unfortunately, many teachers equate discipline with classroom management, neglecting the numerous other components of effective management (many of which have been stressed in this chapter), which inevitably leads to disappointing results. For many, discipline implies a reaction to misbehavior. Throughout this chapter, we have emphasized that teachers generate management through specific actions directed toward creating a functional learning environment and preventing misbehavior. Behavior problems are minimized when students are engaged in learning, when they have developed social and emotional skills that enable them to pursue their needs and goals in prosocial ways, when the relationships in the classroom are supportive and caring, and when they feel a sense of autonomy and ownership over the class because they share responsibility for it. That being said, the presence of these conditions does not obviate the need for a clear boundary-setting structure. No matter how well designed and executed the proactive elements of the management plan, students will occasionally make mistakes in their behaviors, just as they do when learning academic skills. In an SEL-infused classroom, these mistakes in judgment highlight social skill deficits. Seen in that light, they do not call for retribution. Just like mistakes in solving math problems, they are opportunities for learning and growing—in other words, social-emotional skill-building for the next time.

Countless pages in books, magazines, and journals have been written on what constitutes effective discipline, and there is still considerable disagreement on its most basic features (see, e.g., Bear, 2005; Emmer & Aussiker, 1990; Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003; Freiberg, 1999a; Moles, 1990; Tauber, 1999; Wolfgang, 2001). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review that literature in depth or make far-reaching conclusions about the research. This section will focus on the main elements of discipline that are compatible with SEL and enhance students’ social and emotional growth.
Rules

Rules are necessary for any society or organization to function. Boundaries educate children about what is acceptable and what is not. Learning to act with self-control and respect for others is predicated on having clear rules that define responsible behavior in a particular environment. Therefore, clear rules are necessary for an SEL-oriented classroom.

Everyone agrees that class rules should be established early in the year, and most advocate that it be done on the first day of school. Brady, Forton, Porter, and Wood (2003) recommend that the creation of rules wait a few days, until the teacher has established a sense of order, predictability, and trust in the classroom. They contend that the basic elements of a caring community must be established before students can contribute meaningfully to rule making. Many experts, though not all, encourage teachers to create class rules “democratically” (e.g., Brady et al., 2003; Schaps & Solomon, 1990; Weinstein & Mignano, 2003). This means that, like in a democracy, rules are developed with the students rather than simply imposed on them. If they are truly a product of the whole class’s effort, the students are far more likely to respect and show a commitment to the rules. The teacher must manage this process to ensure that all students feel they have contributed and that the final set of rules is reasonable, age-appropriate, and fair to the students and the teacher. Establishing democratic rules is a necessity for an SEL-infused classroom because it promotes two important SEL competencies: following the rules and norms of a group and learning how to self-govern, cooperate, and choose responsible actions in a democratic environment.

Establishing and enforcing rules are necessary but not sufficient. To ensure that students understand them and are able to follow them, rules, like SEL skills, must be discussed, taught, modeled, and practiced. “Respecting oneself and others,” or some variation on the theme, is found in most classrooms. “Respect” is a very abstract—even confusing—concept, especially to young children. What does respect look like? What types of behaviors does respect imply? Discussing, teaching, modeling, and practicing respectful behavior enable students to learn how to follow the rule. Rules are rarely learned after one lesson or discussion. The more difficult rules require practice and repetition throughout the year or across years.

Procedures

Procedures and routines are a little different than rules. They tend to be narrower and more specific. Rather than dealing with general behavior standards, they focus on day-to-day classroom functioning. Some are derivatives of general rules. For example, a procedure for raising one’s hand and getting called on before speaking shows respect for the teacher and other students and helps to develop listening skills and patience, among other things. But raising one’s hand is not a valued skill, in and of itself, that one hopes students take into life. It is simply an arbitrarily chosen procedure that keeps the classroom orderly and functioning while promoting SEL skills. Another arbitrary sign for wanting to speak could have been chosen, but raising one’s hand was picked because of its efficiency. Well-oiled procedures and routines are vital tools in effectively running a classroom. Based on the SEL model, procedures should be clear and consistent, efficient, well-practiced, and instituted proactively beginning on the first day of school. Establishing procedures can save enormous amounts of time and effort in the long run. Furthermore, solid routines can prevent distractions and student misbehavior because students know what to expect and what is expected of them (Weinstein & Mignano, 2003).

Procedures may be constructed somewhat arbitrarily, but they can have a major impact on the SEL goals of the classroom. For example, Share Circles are only effective if each student has an opportunity to share and perceives that others are paying attention when he or she speaks. That is why the procedure Speaker Power is used to manage the discussion, ensuring that everyone knows when to listen and has an opportunity to speak without interruption.
Responses and Feedback

Though classroom management is primarily a proactive and preventive process, there will always be a need to respond and give feedback about student behavior—both positive and negative. Even though it is inherently a reactive task, the system of responses to problem behavior is such an important component of classroom management—it can either “make or break” the entire system—that it should be planned out in advance.

Marshall and Weisner (2004) elegantly present a theory of discipline that enhances rather than impedes SEL development. They begin by stating a similar goal for classroom management as that proposed by this chapter: to promote responsible behavior guided by internal motivation. They propose a hierarchy of social development modeled on Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs and Kohlberg’s (1984) stages of moral development. From lowest to highest, the levels of their hierarchy are:

A—Anarchy
B—Bossing/Bullying
C—Cooperation/Conformity
D—Democracy

Levels A and B lead to socially destructive behaviors that are never acceptable. Level C is acceptable but has some drawbacks. Most teachers and administrators are satisfied when students’ actions reflect compliance. In fact, it is often impossible to discern from a prosocial behavior itself whether the motivation is cooperation with authority or self-directed responsibility that is the cornerstone of self-rule (i.e., democracy). For example, students may clean up the room at the end of an art lesson because it is the responsible thing to do to maintain a healthy, orderly environment or because the teacher will punish them if they don’t. In both cases, the behavior is good, but the SEL implications are quite different.

McCaslin and Good (1998) point out three drawbacks of managing for compliance. First, compliance depends on constant monitoring; there is little maintenance over time. Students learn to value the tools of compliance, not the content of the curriculum or responsible behavior. Second, if compliance is the only means of management, then prosocial behavior is unlikely to generalize to different settings. Third, complex instructional modalities, such as cooperative learning, are very difficult to manage through compliance alone. Students need to self-regulate to make cooperative learning work. Furthermore, a focus on external recognition and regulation can encourage convergent thinking, completing the task, and getting it “right” at the expense of divergent thinking, creativity, and deep understanding. The mediocre effort necessary to obtain positive feedback or avoid negative feedback will likely lead to mediocre learning (see chapter 24 in this volume). Raising students’ motivation to level D is necessary for the constructivist, problem-solving curriculum. “We believe that the intended modern school curriculum, which is designed to produce self-motivated active learners, is seriously undermined by classroom management policies that encourage, if not demand, simple obedience” (McCaslin & Good, 1992, p. 4). Management systems should go beyond demanding compliance and strive to foster the skills necessary for democratic values and personal responsibility.

Based on their hierarchy of social development, Marshall and Weisner (2004) use contemporary business management theory to advocate a style of classroom management based on trust and collaboration, rather than coercion and control. Like SEL, they approach misbehavior in the same mode as an academic mistake: as a learning opportunity. When students make mistakes in math problems, (most) teachers do not yell at them or belittle them. They use it as an opportunity to teach a skill that the student has not yet mastered. When viewed through this lens, the teacher is less likely to take the mistaken behavior personally
and better able to devise a response that helps the child to fix the problem and act differently in the future.

The perspective just presented is supported, for the most part, by Bear’s (1998) detailed review of empirical research on classroom discipline. Bear (1998, 2005) argues for a two-part goal of discipline. In the short term, the goal is managing the class and controlling problems. The long-term goal is developing students’ self-discipline. This, he says, is the essence of the authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1966), which is widely regarded as the most effective and is most compatible with SEL. Based on this framework, Bear (1998) divides the classroom management research into three basic elements, each of which is necessary: (1) Teachers should focus on prevention through the creation of a positive classroom climate and effective day-to-day management, (2) operant learning strategies are used for short-term problems, and (3) social problem solving is used to promote the long-term goal self-discipline. Like Marshall and Weisner (2004), Bear defines self-discipline as the internalization of democratic ideals. Because it is internally motivated, it is only evident when external regulators are not present. That is why one must move beyond operant strategies to foster self-discipline.

Rewards and Punishments. The most contentious aspect of Bear’s (1998) model, indeed the most contentious issue in classroom management, is the use of operant learning strategies (step 2), such as rewards and punishments, to control discipline problems. Short-term evaluations of operant strategies often show that they are effective at reducing or increasing the frequency of target behaviors, so Bear argues that judicious use of operant learning is necessary in the classroom. However, there are significant limitations and drawbacks of operant learning strategies, particularly when viewed through the lens of SEL. Reeve (chapter 24 in this volume) reviews the costs and benefits of using rewards in the classroom. Though extrinsic rewards often work in the immediate context, Reeve describes three “hidden costs” (Condry & Chambers, 1978; Lepper & Greene, 1978). Rewards can (a) reduce intrinsic motivation for the target behavior or activity, (b) interfere with the quality of learning, and (c) undermine students’ ability to autonomously self-regulate. All of these are, by definition, damaging to a student’s academic, social, and emotional development, and they could lead to poorer behavior in the future.

The three costs of rewards apply to punishment, only more so. In addition, punishment can damage the teacher-child relationship that is so important to creating the conditions for academic, social, and emotional learning. Furthermore, the way that punishment is meted out in most schools is ineffective. In essence, punishment is a stimulus (generally an aversive one) that reduces the target behavior when it is introduced. If common school “punishments” worked, young people would be more likely to comply after they were punished. Yet, in most schools, it seems that the same students are sent repeatedly to the office or detention. This means that these so-called punishments do not meet the scientific definition, and they certainly do not fulfill the premise of SEL-based classroom management: to promote academic, social, and emotional learning over the long term through the development of self-control and self-discipline.

Positive Recognition and Feedback. Despite these limitations to many types of rewards and punishments, qualitative and meaningful feedback are absolutely necessary to developing academic, social, and emotional skills. A few SEL-oriented guidelines should be followed. First, verbal praise has been found to both increase and decrease intrinsic motivation, depending on how and in what context it was delivered (see Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Therefore, it is best to use praise judiciously or limit its use in the same way as tangible rewards. Praise should be unexpected and performance-contingent. This requires that praise is only given meaningfully—for real effort and good work—rather than for just completing a task. It also means that different levels of performance should not be praised equally. Substantial praise should be used sparingly, reserved for when it is truly deserved. Too often, students begin to
expect praise for the completion of tasks irrespective of quality or effort, which can lead to reductions in intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and learning (Deci et al., 1999). Second, feedback should take the form of self-evaluation, whenever possible. This can be done by non-judgmentally pointing out specific aspects of the student’s work and teaching the student to self-assess in a productive, realistic way. Being specific is the third guideline to positive feedback; specificity conveys the teacher’s interest in the child’s work and is far more informative than general feedback. Fourth, Dweck and her colleagues’ research on the effects of rewards on achievement motivation suggests that praise should be effort- rather than trait-oriented. “You did well on this test—you’re so smart,” an example of trait praise, can lead to a child’s feeling less smart and less motivated after a subsequent failure. However, praising effort (e.g., “You worked really hard on this”) can help to increase persistence and avoid discouragement when failure inevitably occurs (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Finally, praise should be respectful, not patronizing, and take the child’s point of view rather than just the teacher’s.

**Punishment and Natural and Logical Consequences.** No matter how efficient the teacher’s prevention efforts, students will test the limits of the rules, and responses will be needed to correct the behavior, control the situation, and teach positive and responsible alternatives. Mistaken behaviors are not only inevitable, they are necessary for social and emotional growth because people often learn best from their mistakes. As described above, many common forms of “punishment” can be ineffective in the short term and, even if they are effective, reduce intrinsic motivation, learning, and autonomous self-regulation. Responses to misbehavior should help to teach the important SEL skills of understanding and anticipating the consequences of one’s actions, self-regulating, and learning to problem solve more effectively in the future.

The following guidelines help link a “disciplinary” action with SEL:

1. The response should separate the deed from the doer. The teacher should make clear that the problem is the behavior, not the child.
2. Teachers should teach children they have the power to choose their actions and that they can learn to avoid losing control.
3. Responses should encourage reflection, self-evaluation, and problem-solving. Lectures and teacher-centered explaining have the same limited effectiveness for SEL skill-building as they do for academic skill development. Students are more likely to “own” the problem if they are asked rather than told what the problem is and given an opportunity to figure out how to fix it.
4. Responses to a mistaken behavior should involve the child learning the rationale for and practicing prosocial alternatives that can be reasonably used in similar future situations. This basic SEL technique fosters feelings of responsibility for correcting and preventing the problem.

Natural and logical consequences are so called because their goal is to teach children to understand, anticipate, and make decisions based on the consequences of their actions in the real world (Brady et al., 2003; Dreikurs & Loren, 1968; Nelsen, Lynn, & Glenn, 2000). Natural consequences occur “naturally,” without any intervention from the outside. For example, if a child plays too roughly with a particular toy and it breaks, then the consequence is that the child’s toy is now ruined. There is no need for an external, punitive intervention—the child begins to learn from the direct consequences of his or her mistakes, which is the goal of this system. Logical consequences are needed when the misbehavior substantially affects others or when the potential natural consequence is too severe. Logical consequences are a subset of punishments, in the sense that they are imposed stimuli used to reduce a target behavior. However, they have three basic features that are meant to maximize their informational value.
while minimizing the control aspect, thereby supporting the child’s need for autonomy; when autonomy is maintained, the child is more likely to focus on the information aspect of the feedback. Logical consequences must be related, reasonable, and respectful. Being related means that they must be logically related to the misbehavior. For example, if a student writes on his or her desk, a related consequence would be for the student to clean the desk, not for the student to go to detention. Reasonable means that the severity of the consequence must be mild. If a kindergartener knocks down another student’s block tower, it is unreasonable to have the student sit quietly in his or her chair for 45 minutes while the rest of the class is playing. Instead, the student might help rebuild the tower. Finally, consequences must be delivered respectfully. Despite the fact that the teacher probably wants to display his or her anger, consequences are most effective when delivered calmly and matter-of-factly (see Brady et al., 2003; Dreikurs & Loren, 1968; Nelsen et al., 2000).

Natural and logical consequences are solidly aligned with SEL theory. SEL focuses a great deal on students’ decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution processes. A critical reflection point of these processes is the anticipation of outcomes. Likely influenced by advances in the ubiquity and realism of digital media (Postman, 1995), children’s ability to discern the realistic consequences of their actions is a growing problem for those who care about their socialization. Early research in SDM/SPS, for example, showed that problem behaviors were most likely to occur when children anticipated positive consequences from negative actions (Leonard & Elias, 1993). The simplest example: “He was bothering me, so I hit him to make him stop.” Indeed, that stoppage is a natural consequence, but it is not the only one, and students need guidance to help them understand how the world around them works so that their view of consequences is realistic and takes into account long- and short-term outcomes both for themselves and for others.

Indeed, the term consequences has become very popular in discipline circles, especially in schools, partially because of the natural and logical concept and partially because it sounds less harsh or cruel than punishment. However, calling something a consequence does not make it so, just as calling something a punishment may not be accurate. From an SEL point of view, the potential for consequences to foster empathy and perspective-taking better than other forms of punishment is critical. Natural and logical consequences must increase compliance in the short term (like punishments), as well as promote long-term maintenance and generalization to situations in which the child is not being monitored. Only carefully and appropriately administered natural and logical consequences promote intrinsic motivation, self-control, and personal responsibility. Essential for these techniques to have their desired positive effect is that they are rooted in a caring relationship between teachers and students. The most direct implication of this insight is that students may perceive the same technique delivered in the same way differently if administered prior to a caring relationship being established (i.e., too early in the school year).

One type of logical consequence that helps to build the SEL skills of empathy and perspective-taking is what Brady et al. (2003) call Apology of Action. An apology of action is an active way to fix a problem the child has caused interpersonally. It includes but goes beyond a verbal apology. The child is expected at least to repair the damage done (or its equivalent), which is the type of consequence that adults face all the time at work and at home. Optimally, the child suggests a way to fix the problem, which makes a far greater impression than a grudging apology and takes the teacher out of the position of being the “enforcer.”

**SEL-Derived Skills for Preventing and Correcting Misbehavior**

**Problem Solving and Problem Diaries.** Problem-solving paradigms, such as FIG TESP (described earlier), can be enormously useful in responding to behavior mistakes. They can be used to work collaboratively with a child to fix problems, come up with alternative
strategies for challenging situations, and devise appropriate logical consequences. FIG TESP teaches the child that he or she has the power to choose different actions and encourages the child to take ownership for the mistake and its outcomes. With copious problem-solving practice, students may begin to envision the likely consequences of their actions before they take them and feel responsible for acting constructively in new situations.

When a child gets into “trouble” or has a conflict with a peer, problem solving should be used, regardless of whether a punishment strategy is also called for. In SDM/SPS, that means filling out a Problem Diary with a teacher, guidance counselor, or administrator. Problem Diaries follow the FIG TESP problem-solving heuristic, focusing primarily on the first four steps: Feelings, Identify the problem, Goal, and Think of possible solutions. Solutions often include other SDM/SPS skills, such as using BEST or Keep Calm (described later). As students accumulate skills, they become part of their social-emotional tool belts. Like a skilled carpenter, students learn when and how to use each tool. Using SEL skills in the face of real-life problems is the only way for students to truly learn them, and it is vital to the discipline process, as well. This is a major area of synergy between SEL and classroom management.

**Self-Regulation.** A component skill of self-control and self-discipline is self-regulation. For students to be able to control their actions over the long term, they must be able to monitor and regulate their emotions and behaviors independently. There are a number of techniques that can be helpful in teaching students to accomplish this notoriously difficult skill. Emotional self-regulation involves two steps: self-monitoring and emotion management. Self-monitoring emotions requires that students are able to identify the names of emotions they are feeling based on their bodily sensations and cognitions. Emotion words can be taught using a number of games, and the student’s unique bodily sensations should be discussed to help the student identify feelings as they are beginning to take hold. Once students are able to identify and self-monitor their emotions, they need practical strategies to be able to manage them and use them constructively.

**Feelings Fingerprints.** One specific example of how these techniques are operationalized within SEL is the SDM/SPS Program’s Feelings Fingerprints procedure. What follows is how we present the technique to teachers to, in turn, present to their students. For children to self-monitor, they need to understand that their bodies send them signals when they are about to lose control. SDM/SPS calls these signals of anger or stress Feelings Fingerprints. (At the secondary level, we use the term, Stress Signature, and make the appropriate adjustments in the analogy.) Why? Like fingerprints, everyone has a unique set. Some people get headaches, a nervous stomach, a stiff neck, or sweaty palms. Others get a dry mouth, a quick heartbeat, clenched fists, a flushed face, or itchy skin. Most have more than one such signal. When teachers find themselves in a stressful or difficult choice situation, they can verbalize how they are feeling and what their Feelings Fingerprints are. This bridges naturally into asking students, “You just heard how my body sends me a headache behind my left eye and a red face when I am upset and under stress. How do YOUR bodies let YOU know when you are upset?”

When learning Feelings Fingerprints, students take turns generating examples of situations during which they felt upset, and what their Feelings Fingerprints were. Those situations are labeled “trigger situations.” They learn that being aware of their Feelings Fingerprints and anticipating trigger situations serve as warning systems that they are facing a tough situation and need to use self-control to keep calm. Teachers may use this opportunity to discuss with students what it means to use self-control. They ask students to share different times and situations in which they have to use self-control. Then, the teachers ask for strategies for maintaining self-control, such as Keep Calm (see the following), and help students make proactive plans to disengage from problem situations.
Keep Calm. SDM/SPS relies on Keep Calm, which was derived from Lamaze childbirth preparation procedures, to reduce students' anxiety, anger, and frustration. Keep Calm is simple and short, and it helps students to maintain self-control by reducing physiological arousal. Keep Calm begins with identifying the first physical signs of anger. The person says to him or herself: “Stop. Keep calm.” Then, the person takes a number of slow breaths, counting to five while breathing in, two while holding one’s breath, and five while breathing out. This “5-2-5” technique is simple to remember, prompt, and apply, and it reduces arousal so that the person can respond in a productive way.

Behavioral self-regulation involves self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-instruction. Students who are competent at controlling their behavior, especially when they are not in an external reinforcement environment, do these tasks in their heads. Students who have more trouble exerting self-control and knowing how to act appropriately may need help working on these component skills. Self-monitoring worksheets make the skill visual and physically active rather than abstract and cognitive. The teacher can then work with the child to improve the accuracy of the self-monitoring and improve self-evaluation and self-instruction. Problem solving is very useful in this process, which empowers the child to learn, step by step, how to develop self-control (Weinstein & Mignano, 2003).

Action 4: Share Responsibility with Students

The final recommended action for bringing together SEL and effective classroom management is sharing responsibility with students. If we want children to learn responsibility, we have to give them as many opportunities as possible to experiment with it and grow comfortable, confident, and skilled at taking it. Sharing responsibility with students also increases their commitment to the classroom, increases their motivation and prosocial behavior, and reduces behavior mistakes that result from frustration and feelings of powerlessness. Empowering students is the best way to encourage them to take responsibility and contribute—rather than detract and destroy.

This chapter has already mentioned a number of ways in which responsibility can be shared with students, beginning with developing democratic classroom rules. Students can contribute to the physical environment of the classroom with their artwork and through representations of their individuality. Students also benefit from and respond to opportunities for input in day-to-day classroom decision making. The decisions students participate in can vary from choosing a signal for quiet to requesting a friend to sit with when the class’s seating arrangement changes. Even giving students’ input into small choices, such as the order of the day’s schedule, can increase motivation. Teachers should not and need not give over all classroom governance to the students. The teacher is far more aware of all of the issues that go into decisions and is ultimately responsible for the productivity of the class. However, giving students choices—even between two acceptable options—makes the class more manageable and productive and increases students’ social-emotional competencies, such as social responsibility and group decision making (Elias et al., 1997; Weinstein & Mignano, 2003).

One of the most important applications of these concepts is in establishing rules for cooperative learning groups. Cooperative learning is a specific SEL technique, and its successful use requires students to be prepared for and trained in the skills they are expected to use when they come together to work cooperatively in groups. Several key questions are posed by teachers, for which groups must come up with reasonable and age-appropriate answers: How will we make sure that everyone in the group has an equal chance to participate? How will we show that we have listened to what each person in the group has said? How will we handle it when someone in the group is angry, upset, or out of control? How will we handle it when someone in the group is not being fair to or respectful of someone else in the group? The answer to these
questions (which can include “ask the teacher for help,” especially among younger students) constitutes a set of group rules that becomes an informal social contract for democratically derived shared responsibility. Students should recognize that the nature of their work group is such that it cannot be considered a success if one or two children take over a task and create an “A” project by excluding others.

In addition to group input into decisions, it is important to give individuals choices, particularly about their work. For example, teachers can allow students to choose books for independent reading and decide what type of project they want to create when they are done. If students are allowed to choose between a number of teacher-approved options to communicate their learning, such as a website, an advertisement, a newspaper, a Dr. Seuss-style poem, or a PowerPoint presentation, they are more likely to care about, enjoy, and excel at the assignment because it fulfills their need for autonomy. And, once again, the opportunity to choose improves the students’ sense of personal responsibility and confidence in making decisions and following through on them (Freiberg, 1999b; Weinstein & Mignano, 2003).

When students do active service in the classroom, the school, and the community, they develop a sense of contribution and responsibility. Many classrooms have rotating job charts that give each student a new classroom responsibility each week. Though the tasks can be menial or miniscule—such as handing out assignments or feeding the hamster—students often take them very seriously and learn that contributing is essential to a functional community and a privilege to take part in. In addition, it increases the students’ sense of “ownership” of the classroom, which, in turn, increases their feelings of responsibility for its functioning and supportive atmosphere. School-wide service serves a similar function.

Service-learning is a well-developed model for linking meaningful service and advocacy in the school or community to the intellectual, social, and emotional learning goals of the classroom. High-quality service learning goes well beyond community service. It is integrated with academics synergistically, it is sustained over time, it matches genuine community needs to students’ academic and SEL goals and skills, and it requires time for structured student reflection and discussion about the service and its implications (Fredericks, 2003). This approach is the gold standard in educational practice for teaching students to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and to build their empathic awareness of diverse others.

CONCLUSION

Based on a brief review of the literature on the effectiveness of SEL, we developed four basic action steps to integrate SEL with classroom management, with the goal of creating a seamless system that promotes academic, social, and emotional learning. These steps—teaching social-emotional skills, building caring relationships, setting firm and fair boundaries, and sharing responsibility with students—are all crucial in making a classroom organization and management system positive, preventive, and effective in all meanings of the word. Modifications and additions to these guidelines are needed when implementing them, but educators should attempt to be as inclusive as possible to protect the integrity of the system.

The ideal classroom manager creatively incorporates SEL concepts into every facet of a well-functioning classroom because SEL and effective classroom management are two sides of the same coin. In both fields, self-control and responsibility are the ultimate goals. Integrating proven practices from both creates the optimal conditions for the attainment of those goals based on current theoretical and empirical knowledge. It is based on the strategy of making classrooms into caring and functional environments in the short term, while equipping students to become responsible, knowledgeable, productive, empathetic, and active citizens throughout their lives.
The challenges of attaining these goals cannot not fall on any one teacher. Only by coordinated and continuous application of the principles outlined herein can the desired impact on students occur. Yet, nearly two millennia ago, a Jewish educator recognized that each teacher must do his or her part, with no alibis or excuses: “You are not responsible for completing the work, nor are you free to give up on it” (Pirke Avot 2:21). No teacher can be fully responsible for the growth—academic or otherwise—of his or her students. Students are influenced by so many other factors and spend only a few months in each classroom before moving on. Nevertheless, it is each teacher’s responsibility to provide students with as many useful tools as possible to enable them to build their own futures. And it is the responsibility of all educators to see that all students pass through organized, caring, and skill-enhancing classrooms and school environments so that they can become academically, socially, and emotionally competent adults.

APPENDIX A

CASEL’s Essential SEL Skills and Competencies (adapted from Elias, 2003)

Know Yourself and Others

- Identify feelings—Recognize and label’s feelings in oneself and others.
- Be responsible—Understand and act upon one’s obligation to engage in ethical, safe, and legal behaviors.
- Recognize strengths—Identify and cultivate one’s positive qualities.

Make Responsible Decisions

- Manage emotions—Regulate feelings so that they aid rather than impede the handling of situations.
- Understand situations—Accurately understand the circumstances one is in.
- Set goals and plans—Establish and work toward the achievement of specific short- and long-term outcomes.
- Solve problems creatively—Engage in a creative, disciplined process of exploring alternative possibilities that lead to responsible, goal-directed action, including overcoming obstacles to plans.

Care for Others

- Show empathy—Identify and understand the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Respect others—Act on the belief that others deserve to be treated with kindness and compassion as part of our shared humanity.
- Appreciate diversity—Understand that individual and group differences complement one another and add strength and adaptability to the world around us.

Know How to Act

- Communicate effectively—Use verbal and nonverbal skills to express oneself and promote effective exchanges with others.
- Build relationships—Establish and maintain healthy and rewarding connections with individuals and groups.
- Negotiate fairly—Strive to achieve mutually satisfactory resolutions to conflict by addressing the needs of all concerned.
• Refuse provocations—Convey and follow through effectively with one’s decision not to engage in unwanted, unsafe, and unethical behavior.
• Seek help—Identify one’s need for help and access appropriate assistance and support in pursuit of needs and goals.
• Act ethically—Guide decisions and actions by a set of principles or standards derived from recognized legal/professional codes or moral or faith-based systems of conduct.

APPENDIX B

Sample Lesson Plan for Third Grade Language Arts: An Example of Integrating Academics and Social-Emotional Skill Building (adapted from Cartledge & Milburn, 1995)

Objectives

• Students will read and analyze literature through the lens of social and emotional skills.
• Students will become familiar with the concept of body language and its importance in social interactions.
• Students will recognize specific examples of emotional body language.
• Students will practice demonstrating emotions through body language.

Materials

• Buffalo before breakfast by Mary Pope Osborne (1999). (This lesson can be adapted for any piece of children’s literature that has an example of reading body language.)

Motivation

As part of a regular reading/language arts lesson, the teacher begins by reading a passage from Buffalo before breakfast by Mary Pope Osborne (1999) in which the protagonists, Jack and Annie, first meet the Lakota people. In the passage, Jack and Annie report that even though the Lakota people are not saying anything, they do not appear to be angry.

Procedure

1. Providing a rationale
   a. Using this passage as a jumping off point, the teacher poses the following questions:
      
      How do the characters know the Lakota people are not angry?
      Can you show me what the Lakota people might have looked like if they were angry?
      What do you look like when you are angry?
      [Students respond by saying that there are various signs of anger in the face, arms, and shoulders of the person.]
   b. The teacher introduces the term “body language” and encourages students to make text-to-self connections:
      Why is reading body language helpful?
      When Jack and Annie read body language, how does that help them?
      Can you give me examples of times when reading body language has helped you?

2. Breaking down the skill into its components

   The teacher asks students to suggest different parts of the body that display anger and writes the ideas on the board:
   Which parts of your face or body change when you are angry? [e.g., clenched teeth, a furrowed brow, raised shoulders.]
3. Modeling
As they suggest angry body signs, students model the actions for their peers. The teacher also asks students to model other emotions so that their peers can guess what they are "feeling." With each example of a new emotion, the teacher uses the student model to help the class break down the body language into its components.

4. Skill performance and feedback: Guess My Emotion game
a. The teacher divides the students into groups and asks them to write down components of body language for fear and happy. They share these lists with their groups and then practice acting out these emotions for the other members of their group.
b. Each group is assigned an emotion to present to the class. The class practices reading body language by guessing the other groups’ emotions.

Feedback and Assessment

- The teacher circulates during groupwork to monitor progress and understanding.
- With each group presentation, the teacher gives specific feedback on the display of the emotion and on the class’s interpretation, as well as encouraging students to give appropriate and constructive feedback to each other.

Follow-up

- The teacher assigns students to practice reading their siblings’ and friends’ body language after school and report back the next day.
- The teacher will reinforce the skill of reading social and emotional cues in another two reading lessons as soon as is feasible, as well as in future lessons involving literature and other media.
- The teacher will remind students about this skill when it comes up in real-world social interactions in the classroom and throughout the school.

For a skill as complex as recognizing others’ emotions through body language to be fully integrated into the students’ social skill repertoire, multiple lessons along these lines would be necessary, as well as cueing and practice in real-world situations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank George Bear, University of Delaware, for his helpful review of this chapter.

REFERENCES


Spotlight on Success: Changing the Culture of Discipline in Denver Public Schools

DU-DPS Researcher-Practitioner Partnership on School Discipline

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Disclaimer: The views and positions expressed by the authors and research participants are theirs alone, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of Denver Public Schools.
About the DU-DPS Researcher Practitioner Partnership
This study was conducted as part of a researcher-practitioner partnership between the University of Denver (DU) Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) and the Office of Social-Emotional Learning at Denver Public Schools (DPS). GSSW and OSEL work together to improve school discipline outcomes and reduce racial disparities in exclusionary discipline practices. The overall goals of the partnership are to:

- Conduct rigorous and relevant research on school discipline and racial disparities in exclusionary practices.
- Sustain and strengthen efforts to use research to inform local policy, programs, and practices.
- Work with policy makers and practitioners to identify preventive interventions to disseminate broadly.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank administrators, teachers, school social workers, OSEL partners, school psychologists, and other staff members from schools that participated in the qualitative study:

Amesse Elementary School
Bradley International Elementary
Carson Elementary School
CEC Middle College of Denver
College View Elementary School
DCIS at Fairmont Elementary School
Denver Center for 21st Learning
Denver School of the Arts
Dora Moore School
DSST: Byers Middle School
DSST: Green Valley Ranch High
DSST: Stapleton High School
Edison Elementary School
Green Valley Elementary School
High Tech Elementary School
Highline Academy Charter School
Hill Campus of Arts and Sciences
Isabella Bird Community School
Kaiser Elementary School
Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy
Lincoln Elementary School
Marie L. Greenwood Academy
Munroe Elementary School
P.U.S.H. Academy
Park Hill School
Rocky Mountain Prep
SOAR at Green Valley Ranch
Stedman Elementary School
Swigert International School
The Odyssey School
University Park Elementary School
West Leadership Academy
Westerly Creek Elementary

We also appreciate support from the Office of Accountability, Research and Evaluation at Denver Public Schools for their assistance with obtaining and cleaning district records.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This mixed methods study draws on district discipline data, interviews, and focus groups to identify characteristics of DPS schools who met the district’s discipline goals of a 0-3% suspension rate for their student population overall and for Black students in particular during the 2014-2015 school year.

Quantitative Findings

Statistical analyses comparing schools who met the district’s discipline goals to those who did not revealed that low-suspending schools had the following features:

- More racially and economically integrated
- Fewer serious discipline incidents (type 2-6) reported by school staff
- Greater use of Restorative Practices in response to discipline incidents
- Less frequent use of in- and out-of-school suspension among disciplined students

Qualitative Findings

Principals and school staff from a subset of low-suspending schools reported the following common strategies, conditions, and district resources were used to meet the district’s discipline goals:

Positive Behavior and School Culture Systems
- Relationship Building
- Behavioral Recognitions and Rewards
- Social-Emotional Skill Building
- Restorative Practices

Inclusive Policies and Protocols for Responding to Misbehavior
- Start with Classroom-Based Interventions
- Connect Misbehaving Students to Support Services
- Use Punitive and Exclusionary Discipline Practices as a Last Resort

Supportive Implementation Conditions
- Robust School-Based Student and Family Services
- Professional Learning, Training and Coaching
- Strategic Hiring for Culture Fit

Awareness of Racial Inequalities and Bias
- Strengthen Staff Members Knowledge about Racial Disparities
- Prioritize Relationship Building with Black Families and Students

District Supports
- Policy & Intervention Consultations with Discipline Coordinators
- Professional Development Units on Restorative Practices and Equity
Recommendations

The following recommendations are focused on themes from this report that were consistent across our qualitative and quantitative data, and supported by prior research:

Schools

- Engage all school staff in ongoing professional learning about universal strategies for relationship-building, proactive classroom management approaches, equity frameworks, and implicit bias.
- Collaboratively (re)establish and teach school-wide expectations for students and staff members every school year, with regular opportunities for recognition of positive behavior.
- Greet students and implement social-emotional learning or community building activities at the start of the school day.
- Participate in the Parent-Teacher Home Visit program.
- Use Restorative Practices to resolve discipline incidents.

The District

- Strengthen initiatives that promote racially and socioeconomically integrated schools, such as high quality schools in every neighborhood, and transportation for students who choice-in to sites outside of their community.
- Increase the availability of engaging and tailored site- or network-based trainings on Equity, PBIS, and Restorative Practices.
- Provide training and consultation on evidence-based classroom management approaches like Responsive Classroom.
- Expand the Parent-Teacher Home Visit program to a greater number of schools, prioritizing those with high suspension rates.
- Conduct a needs assessments of schools that have consistently been unable to meet the district’s discipline goals.
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INTRODUCTION

The goals of the project were to identify strategies and interventions used by schools who met the district’s goals of reducing and maintaining suspension rates of 0-3% for all students, and Black students in particular, during the 2014-2015 school year. With support from district partners, the research team led a mixed methods study of low-suspending schools that involved analysis of district discipline records, interviews with school-based administrators, and focus groups with school staff.

KEY TERMS

Approaches and Strategies: Instructional, behavioral, or disciplinary practices that share philosophical underpinnings or other commonalities, but are not necessarily aligned with a specific program or standardized model. These two terms are used interchangeably.

Classroom-based approaches: Strategies that are implemented in the classroom by the teacher during the regular school day.

Discipline records: Information about serious discipline incidents entered by school staff into required fields of the “behavior management” tab in the district’s student information system (Infinite Campus). Staff use this database to record student behaviors that are viewed as chronic or high-level (called Type 2 and above) in which a punitive or exclusionary response outside the classroom, such as suspension or expulsion, is permitted by district policy. The database was not designed to capture less serious discipline incidents, such as occasional disrespect or defiance (called Type 1), for which district policy mandates classroom-based interventions.

Educators or Participants: Used when attributing quotes to individuals who participated in interviews or focus groups, or when discussing themes that were shared by many individuals.

Exclusionary approaches: Strategies for resolving misbehavior that remove students from the classroom or school, including in- or out-of-school suspensions, intervention rooms, and/or expulsions.

Growth-mindset: The belief that intelligence can be developed by various means, as compared to a “fixed-mindset,” which presupposes intelligence is a static, unchanging trait.

Inclusive approaches: Restorative, therapeutic, or behavioral responses to discipline incidents that keep students in the classroom and do not result in missed instructional time. These approaches often involve community service, loss of privileges, peace circles, mediations, counseling and social-emotional skills groups.
**Interventions:** Practices that are used to interrupt or change the behaviors of adults or students (rather than prevent them).

**JK-R:** Denver Public School’s discipline policy (Board of Education Policy JK-R Student Conduct and Discipline Procedures), passed in 2008 with the aim of reducing exclusionary discipline practices and eliminating racial disparities in suspensions. The policy defines the seriousness of different student behaviors in a matrix (Type 1-6) and provides a ladder of recommended interventions. The policy encourages schools to implement classroom-based interventions for low-level behaviors. Restorative Practices and therapeutic interventions are recommended as responses to more serious discipline incidents. Out-of-school suspensions and law enforcement referrals are discouraged unless mandated by district, state, or federal law.

**LEAP.** The observation system used by the district for evaluation of teachers’ growth and performance.

**Low suspending schools:** Schools with 0-3% suspension rates overall and for Black students in particular.

**No Nonsense Nurturing:** A professional development program in assertive discipline that involves four steps: give precise directions, utilize positive narration, provide consequences, and build nurturing relationships with students and families.

**Responsive Classroom:** A professional development program in academic and social-emotional learning. Key components include: student-developed classroom rules, modeling expected behaviors, morning meetings to build community, reinforcing, reminding and redirecting teacher language, and logical consequences in response to rule-breaking behavior.

**Restorative Practices:** An alternative to suspension that involves students and adults identifying the harm caused by a discipline infraction, acknowledging responsibility, and jointly problem-solving to develop strategies for repairing harm.

**Schools:** Used when reporting themes that were evident across several participating sites.

**School culture:** School culture refers to shared expectations about desired, acceptable, and unacceptable student or staff behavior.

**School leader, administrator, principal, or director:** Used interchangeably when it was possible to attribute quotes to a school leader without revealing their identity or school site.

**School-based student service provider:** Professionals who deliver the majority of their services at a school site, such as: school counselors, social workers, nurses or psychologists; restorative justice or social-emotional learning coordinators, family liaisons, deans, student advisors, and interventionists.
**School-wide approaches:** Policies or practices that were described as being used throughout the school, rather than in a single classroom or by a particular staff member.

**Student-focused approaches:** Strategies that target an individual student.

**METHODS**

**Quantitative**
The quantitative dataset used in this analysis included all DPS schools (n=200) during the 2014-2015 school year. Of these schools, 81 (41%) were low-suspending and 119 (59%) did not meet the district’s discipline goals. The quantitative dataset included:

- Student demographics, such as students’ eligibility for free and reduced lunch; limited English proficiency and disability classifications, along with the Colorado State Race/Ethnicity designations: American Indian or Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; Asian or Asian American; Black or African American (non-Hispanic); Hispanic; White (non-Hispanic); and Multiracial;
- Discipline records that included the type of behavior characterizing an incident (Type 2-6), and one or more ways the incident was resolved, including the use of: in-or out-of-school suspensions, behavior contracts, Restorative Practices, referrals to support services, requests for expulsion, and referrals to law enforcement.
- School features such as school size, school governance type (district-managed, innovation, or charter), and grade configuration.

We conducted bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses to identify common characteristics of low-suspending schools in Denver.

**Qualitative**
A subset of schools who met the district’s discipline goals and had a student body that was at least 1% Black (n=36) were invited to participate in the qualitative study. Of the schools that met this criteria, 33 (92%) participated in the study. As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of the schools in the study were elementary schools (60%), followed by schools with non-traditional grade configurations (K-8, 8-12, and K-12) (24%), high schools (9%) and middle schools (6%). Fifty-seven percent were traditional district schools, 21% were charter schools, and 21% were schools with innovative status. Schools in the sample served predominantly students eligible for free and reduced lunch (56%) and students of color (43% Latino, 34% White, 13% Black, 4% Multiracial, 3% Asian and Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian). Compared to all other district schools, qualitative study sites served younger students from more advantaged backgrounds in terms of socioeconomic status, disability, language proficiency, and race, and were more likely to have non-traditional grade configurations (e.g. K-12) (see Table 1, appendix).
Qualitative data was collected twice at each school. First, the study’s primary investigator interviewed key school leaders involved in discipline practices at each school. This typically included the school’s principal, director, or designated administrator(s). The school leader was asked to identify other staff members who had played a key role in discipline practices during the 2014-2015 school year. These individuals were subsequently invited to participate in a two-hour focus group. The protocols used for qualitative data collection were developed during a pilot project and addressed topics such as site-specific discipline policies and practices, prevention and intervention approaches, hiring practices, staffing structures, professional learning, and district supports. In order to prioritize the perspectives of school staff, each focus group began with an activity to encourage participants to generate their own ideas about the factors they felt were most salient to their school’s discipline practices and suspension rates. The interview protocol was then woven into these discussions as relevant.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted between August 2015 and February 2016. In total, 198 educators participated in this study, the majority of whom were predominantly female (71%) and White (70%). Nearly 60% had been at their current school less than five years, but over half of all participants had been working in education longer than ten years. Most of the sample was comprised of administrators or school leaders (39%), followed by teachers (24%) and school-based service providers (23%).

All audio was transcribed verbatim by students enrolled in a master’s-level program and coded by doctoral students using Dedoose qualitative software. The initial coding scheme was developed deductively from three sources: (1) recent research on school discipline (2) themes generated during the pilot study and interviews with school leaders, and (3) input from district partners. Two doctoral students developed a codebook that outlined inclusion and exclusion criteria for different themes and provided stronger and weaker forms of each code. As the research team progressed through the coding and analysis process, the district team provided regular feedback about the development and interpretation of themes from the qualitative data.

**Partnership Process**

The current study was precipitated by two years of previous research on racial disparities conducted through the DU-DPS Researcher-Practitioner Partnership on School Discipline. The partnership consisted of three researchers from the University of Denver and six district partners from Denver Public Schools. Over the course of the Spotlight on Success project, this racially diverse and interdisciplinary team met monthly from August 2015 through June 2016 to plan the study, recruit participating schools, generate preliminary qualitative codes or themes, and make sense of study findings.
STUDY FINDINGS

In the following pages we describe the school features, strategies and conditions of low-suspending schools that met Denver’s discipline goals (0-3% suspension rate overall and for Black students). First, we review quantitative data on the features distinguishing low suspending schools from those in the district that did not meet these goals. Then, we present qualitative findings on the strategies used by a subset of sites to accomplish the district’s discipline goals, followed by a discussion of the conditions schools put in place to assure these approaches were implemented. In order to identify approaches that may be more relevant or useful in different school contexts, we also describe when meaningful differences existed between schools of different grade-levels, racial compositions, or school type.

 Quantitative Results: Features of All Low-Suspending Schools
To identify school features that are related to low suspension rates among all DPS schools, we compared data about the sites that met the district’s discipline goals (n=81) to those that did not (n=119). Descriptive results indicated many differences between these two groups of schools in terms of grade-level, school composition, management type, and discipline practices (see Table 2 in the appendix). However, statistical analyses revealed that when all school features considered simultaneously, schools who met the district's discipline goals had the following defining characteristics (see Table 3 in appendix):

- More racially and economically integrated terms of the proportion of the student body that identified as Black, Native American, Multiracial or Asian and the percent eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- Lower rates of serious discipline incidents (Type 2-6) among all students.
- Greater use of Restorative Practices to resolve serious incidents.

These analyses revealed that on the surface, low-suspending schools appear to be less likely to serve secondary students, students with disabilities, and students who are limited English proficient. Yet what truly distinguished these schools from others was enrollment patterns related to race and class, and most importantly, their discipline practices. Of note, Restorative Practices were the only inclusive response to serious discipline incidents that distinguished schools who met district goals from those who did not.

 Qualitative Results:
Strategies and Approaches used by Low Suspending Schools
Focus groups and interviews with educators mostly involved questions about their schools’ approaches to prevent, and respond to, rule-breaking behavior. In general, participating schools created systems that supported positive behavior and school culture with a combination of 1)
rewards and recognitions for students who met behavioral expectations, 2) inclusive strategies to resolve lower-level infractions like disrespect or defiance, and 3) exclusionary or punitive consequences only in response to high level offenses. The majority of schools implemented classroom-based practices that were linked to school-wide systems, reserving student-level interventions for students whose needs were not met through universal approaches. In the language of the DPS discipline policy, JK-R, these schools emphasized “therapeutic/skills-based” (e.g. social emotional supports and counseling groups) and “restorative” interventions over “administrative” consequences (e.g. suspension and expulsion.)

School-Wide Positive Behavior and School Culture Systems
Most participants believed that intentional systems for cultivating positive behavior and school culture were necessary conditions for low suspension rates and academic success. A principal of an innovation elementary school noted, “The school-wide expectations we establish are a foundation upon which we all stand.” Often statements about school culture were preceded with claims like this is “how we do things” or “who we are” or the converse, “we’re not that kind of school” or “we don’t do that here.” Rather than focusing on the behavior of students alone, these schools created shared agreements about acceptable student and staff conduct. They invested time in establishing cohesive norms and consistent expectations throughout the building:

> We agreed upon certain signals, everybody uses the same bathroom signal, everybody uses the same drink signal, everybody uses the same attention getter. While teachers may vary here and there, every class knows our school clap and our [core values]. Those common expectations are very proactive.

A defining characteristic of positive cultures in these schools was an ethos of shared responsibility among school staff for supporting all students in the building. One teacher reported, “They’re all our kids. I have had that feeling since I started working [here]. All of the kids are as much my responsibility as they are everyone else’s responsibility.” This sense of ownership contrasted sharply with sites that relied on specialized positions or administrators to work with students with rule-breaking behaviors. Many schools found such an approach, in which one individual intervenes with a misbehaving student, to be less effective than school-wide reinforcement of expectations.

Several schools also characterized their school culture as a reflective of a “growth mindset.” Educators from these sites viewed students’ behaviors and adults’ practices as malleable, rather than fixed. A core belief was that making mistakes was to be expected from everyone in the building, and was not something deserving of punishment, shame or judgment. Instead, mistakes or challenges were opportunities to problem-solve and learn new tools. Participants reported that this environment of humility helped prevent discipline incidents from escalating, and also encouraged school staff to use one another as a source of ideas for meeting their students’ needs. In these

“Culture will eat academics every time for breakfast”
– Charter School Educator
schools, a request for assistance with student behavior concerns indicated a teacher’s commitment to equity and inclusion, not weak classroom management skills:

“This school is built around collaboration amongst teachers. The culture here is that teachers are empowered to come together and problem solve or troubleshoot. It’s not out of compliance. We’re coming together as a team because we all have a vision that this kid can and will. And it’s up to us; it’s a really strong common belief around all the staff. We’re a highly diverse school; in order to work here you have to have that sense of ownership.” - K-8 School Leader

Public recognition was another way staff cultivated a positive, supportive culture among one another. Several schools also described opportunities for staff members to ‘shout out’ and spotlight the good things they saw one another doing, as well as dedicated time for apologies and regrets to be made among one another during faculty meetings. The use of scenarios or videos, role plays, and planning or application time were highlighted as being especially helpful for strengthening educators’ behavior and/or discipline practices.

**Relationship Building**

Although we did not ask about the topic directly, one of the most common themes from our conversations with educators was the importance of relationship building, especially with students, but also with families. Participants from secondary schools serving higher proportions of students of color discussed the value of relationship-building the most frequently.

Echoing the sentiment of one participant, “it’s all about the relationships,” many educators attributed their school’s low suspension rates to strong connections between adults and students in the building in which adults had knowledge of students’ lives inside and outside of school. Adults’ awareness of students’ strengths and areas of growth, triggers and coping resources, helped them understand the underlying motivation behind misbehavior, respond effectively, and frame any consequences as being in the best interest of the student. Building relationships with students also facilitated the development of effective interventions that targeted the root cause of the problem (for example, low reading skills, lack of classroom rituals or routines, or trauma), rather than the symptom of acting out. Relationships also allowed educators to connect accountability measures to their specific understanding of a young person’s unique needs. This personal knowledge created the conditions for students to experience discipline as an opportunity for growth and problem solving, rather than impersonal punishment. Additionally, staff members felt students were more willing to take responsibility for their actions, and motivated to change when...
they trusted school adults and felt known. An educator reported, “If you’ve got a relationship with a student, they’re 100 times more likely to listen to you and understand and respond and try.”

Participants described how these relationships were distinct from friendships because they were defined by mutual respect rather than affinity. Some participants characterized their approach as “warm-strict,” explaining that:

“Warm comes down to genuinely showing that you care about each individual student through relationship building, taking an interest in their life outside of school, taking a lot of interest in their life inside of school and how they’re doing and keeping tabs on things….Then, the strict side I think is the accountability side that I am going to hold you accountable and follow up with you when you make a poor choice because I care so much about you.”

Participants were clear that strong student-staff relationships did not involve leniency or lowered expectations for young people, rather, they were rooted in lovingly holding students accountable. Developing rapport through this warm-strict approach was described as creating a sense of reciprocal obligation between staff members and students. Educators observed that these strong relationships minimized problem behaviors and maximized the impact of interventions or consequences.

Three strategies stood out as uniquely focused on building relationships between school staff and students: home visits, morning meetings or advisory periods, and staff visibility both during the school day and during after-school activities. Many schools conducted home visits through the Parent-Teacher Home Visitation Program sponsored by the school district. Home visits often provided school staff with new insights about their students. A secondary school leader observed, “Home visits change the relationship. Once you’re in someone’s home, that opens everyone’s eyes to a different sort of encounter that’s not about grades, it’s not about attendance.” Another frequently cited approach was to use the beginning of the school day as an opportunity to check in with students and learn about their lives, build community, and set a positive tone for the day. Specific practices included greetings, advisory periods that integrate social-emotional learning, and regularly held classroom-based, grade-level, or school-wide morning meetings.

Finally, participants reported that increased visibility of adults during the school day and during after-school

“There’s a lot of schools of thought out there about relationships, if they are important at all. I will go to the end of the earth to say that that’s the number one thing, [but] there’s other people that say you need academics and that’s it. I feel like you have to have rapport with the students. They have to know if you care about them first before they will go the extra mile. Do you respect them? Do you respect them by challenging them, giving them rigorous work?”

– Elementary School Educator
activities supported relationship building by creating opportunities for students and staff to identify common interests and get to know one another. At some schools teachers were encouraged to be visible during lunches and passing periods and some administrators deepened their involvement by leading activities in classrooms on a rotating basis. In other cases, teachers who might see students less frequently, e.g. elective teachers, were integrated into morning meetings in order to connect with students. After school hours, some school staff used time outside of school to get to know students, by attending school-sponsored or community-based sporting events, recitals, or field trips. Although many of these approaches are relatively time-intensive, participants reported that the initial investment was warranted because it yielded substantial benefits. For example, when asked to justify time spent on relationships in the face of a high stakes testing environment, the following comment was typical:

“I would just say it pays off. Like, the proof is in the pudding. I would point to different people who have amazing relationships with students and show them how high the teacher can go with rigor, how the teacher can get them to do that the teacher down the hall can’t get them to do. When [your relationships] are in order, it becomes easier for you to teach.”

The vast majority of discussions about relationships focused on those between staff and students. However, some participants also spoke about relationships with families as being important when addressing behavior concerns. Communicating with caregivers and involving them regularly in conversations about their children’s successes and challenges through calls home or family meetings were the most common approaches to parent engagement.

Restorative Practices
Schools used Restorative Practices to resolve conflict and strengthen relationships with all students, not just those who entered the discipline system. Restorative Practices were described as being used widely across the school building by teachers, school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and school leaders. In other words, these approaches were often deeply embedded in the fabric of systems that supported a positive school culture. Restorative Practices were used across schools serving all grade levels, but were more common in district-managed schools and sites serving greater proportions of students of color and students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

The vast majority of schools described processes for resolving rule-breaking behavior that were aligned with Restorative Practices, although they did not necessarily utilize formal dialogues, mediations or peace circles. These educators worked with students, and at times teachers, to identify the harm caused by wrongdoing, reflect on each person’s contributions to an incident, and develop
ideas about how to repair the damage done. The following key questions guided this process: “What actually took place? How were people affected? What responsibility can you take? How can we come to a solution so that this doesn’t happen again? How can we get along better?” Staff members at these schools acknowledged that “everyone makes mistakes,” but emphasized that students have to “own it,” recognize the “ripple effect” of their actions on others, and “find a solution.” In particular, these educators tended to emphasize the need for “logical consequences” that are explicitly tied to the nature of the misconduct and allow students to reintegrate into the school community. Participants reported that Restorative Practices were more time intensive than suspension, which at times caused frustration among school staff or parents who wanted immediate action or student removal. Still, they reported these challenges were worth facing given the long-term benefits.

Participants reported that Restorative Practices allowed for greater social-emotional development, conflict-resolution, and accountability than punitive or exclusionary consequences because students themselves had to reflect on their actions, develop solutions, and take steps to restore their community or rebuild relationships. Even with younger students, participants reported being able to help students understand how their behavior impacts the larger school community. Educators also observed that Restorative Practices were more culturally responsive than other discipline approaches because they took into account students’ life context and membership in the larger school community. Indeed, the value of Restorative Practices was most often discussed by participants working in schools serving predominantly students of color.

Behavioral Recognitions and Rewards

Another common strategy used to build systems in support of positive behavior and culture involved recognition and rewards for good behavior, overwhelmingly in the model of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS). Elementary schools - especially district-managed sites- had SW-PBIS systems that involved a) explicitly teaching behavioral expectations at the start of the year and revisiting them regularly; b) hanging visuals throughout their buildings with models of desired behaviors; c) using points, bucks, stickers, stamps or tickets to track all students’ positive behavior, character traits, or core values; and, d) using celebrations, rewards, awards or privileges to recognize desired behaviors. Schools serving secondary students usually modeled behaviors implicitly through example and then rewarded or recognized students nominated by their peers or teachers for demonstrating the school’s core values, expectations, or character traits. To identify successful students, schools used teacher or peer nominations and accrual of points, bucks,
Students were then recognized daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly, usually in the form of an award or a “shout out” during a school-wide or grade-level assembly.

**Social Emotional Skill Building**

Many participants observed that social and emotional development was intertwined with their students’ academic growth, and argued that social skills need to be taught in a similar manner to math or reading. The vast majority of study schools used SEL programs or curricula tailored to students’ developmental stages and staff members’ preferences. Popular examples of SEL programs included Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, and Peace4kids. Among schools serving younger students, many incorporated character or core value report cards or passports through which students and their caregivers received feedback about areas of strength and growth. These tools illustrated school’s focus on both academic and social-emotional development for all students. Some schools used older students as mentors to younger students, or as playground or hallway monitors. When classroom and school-level approaches were not resulting in desired changes to student behavior, schools reported referring students out to the Promoting Academics and Character Education (PACE) program run by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Denver program. Nearly half of the schools serving middle school students reported using this program.

Classroom-based SEL strategies included creation of classroom agreements, morning meetings, buddy rooms, and teachers’ use of instructional and classroom management approaches like No Nonsense Nurturing and Responsive Classroom. A few educators found that SEL strategies infused into teachers’ everyday practices and student interactions were more effective than using a specific program for a portion of the school day. Schools that integrated SEL strategies into instruction had lower racial disparities in suspension than other sites, suggesting the promise of this approach to keeping students of color in the classroom.

**Inclusive Policies and Protocols for Responding to Misbehavior**

It was uncommon for participating schools to report having a formal code of conduct in the traditional sense of a list of rules and consequences. Yet this should not be mistaken for the absence of a discipline system or process. Nearly all schools described a general protocol for how staff members should respond to misbehavior. Instead, most schools had an internal process they developed to guide decisions about what staff should do when students did or did not meet school-wide expectations or acted in ways that did not reflect the school’s core values or character attributes. Many schools did use some kind of decision-making tree to guide decisions about who and how to respond to different types of student behavior. Often these documents were based on the district’s discipline offense matrix and intervention ladder, but were modified to their school’s unique approach. Some participants reported that they intentionally did not have a discipline policy beyond what the district mandated, because they did not view most forms of misbehavior as a serious discipline incident, unless it involved physical harm or legal concerns, like drug distribution.
It was common for participants to describe consulting district policy when making decisions about how to respond to disciplinary incidents, usually in conjunction with additional information, such as the student’s history of misbehavior and parental cooperation. As one principal said, “we go straight to the DPS discipline ladder and matrix and decide where it falls, we also pull up that child’s record of issues to see, like, is this the first event, second event, because that helps us make that decision.” Rather than taking a hard-lined approach, school leaders often interpreted district policy as a general framework that needed to be tailored to individual students and school contexts. These leaders did not see district policy as the “end all, be all.” As an elementary school principal said, “Sexual harassment, starting a fire, bringing a weapon to school, there are things like that that are non-negotiable, but conflict among students I try to use as a teaching point and a restorative point not a, ‘oh this is your 3rd time you’re on this ladder you must go home’” Said another administrator, “We view the DPS discipline matrix as, this is as far as we can go [punitive], but we have some wiggle room to find a more creative way.”

These schools tended to treat most forms of misbehavior as opportunities to intervene and teach, rather than punish or exclude. In particular, they had high thresholds for classifying subjective misbehavior such as ‘disrespect’ or ‘defiance’ as serious problems that, under district policy, could be resolved with a suspension. Being less likely to interpret behaviors as disrespect or defiance may be a possible explanation for the low rates of serious discipline incidents reported among these schools. That is, their documentation process reflected a philosophy that conceives of most student misbehavior as “low-level” and requiring classroom-based intervention, rather than exclusionary or punitive consequences.

Three principles underlying district discipline policy were aligned with most schools’ protocols for addressing challenging behavior: 1) Teachers, not administrators, should be the first responders to misbehavior in the classroom; 2) Students with habitual rule-breaking behaviors should be connected to support services; and 3) Punitive and exclusionary practices should only be used as a last resort, after several other approaches had been tried, or in cases when an investigation was needed. These principles were reflected in most schools’ emphasis on classroom-based interventions and support services before suspension would be considered.

Start with Classroom-Based Interventions
The vast majority of schools, around 80%, shared an expectation that classroom teachers should be the first responders to resolving misbehavior and conflict. When students did not meet classroom expectations, common student-focused interventions included redirects and written reflections,
phone calls home or parent conferences. In general, teachers were expected to address behavior in the classroom first, rather than automatically sending a student out or making a referral to administrators or support service providers:

“So, if a kid’s calling out, if a kid refuses to do work if a kid doesn’t come to class prepared, if a kid gets up out of their seat without asking, those are all level 1 things they have to follow a certain progression of a ladder right? If it’s the 10th time it happens, but those are things you have to handle in your classroom...Use your buddy teacher, use a refocus form...Those things aren’t dealt with [outside the classroom] unless it becomes habitual.” – Secondary School Principal

These schools felt that addressing challenging behavior in the classroom played an important role in maintaining positive relationships between teachers and students. Participants often viewed the use of office disciplinary referrals as sending students the message “that you don’t want to deal with them.” Many felt that keeping students in class when they misbehaved allowed the teacher’s authority, relationship and trust with a student to remain intact.

“One of the things that we let teachers know [is that] the child isn’t going to be taken out of your class because they’re having a behavior issue. You have to be willing to change your instruction or how you deal with things to support this child being in your classroom. They’re not going to be leaving your classroom because we don’t have any control of the children that come into our building. These are our kids and we have to work with them. Period.” – Elementary School Principal

**Connecting Students to Support Services**

Most study schools had high thresholds for what was considered an official discipline incident and instead treated most misconduct as an opening to first connect teachers or students to additional resources before a student’s rule-breaking behavior became a problem of discipline. In some cases, this process was guided by Response to Intervention (RtI) or MTSS (Multi-Tiered system of Support) committees, Student Intervention Teams (SIT), or grade-level meetings. In other cases, it was standard practice to refer students to a school-based student services providers before making an office discipline referral. Schools also made an effort to connect challenging students to support services and therapeutic intervention prior to, or simultaneously with, an exclusionary consequence like an in- or out-of-school suspension. The most common types of supports were personal behavior charts, and daily check-ins and outs, one-on-one counseling, physical therapies, manipulatives or modifications to the classroom environment like standing tables or seating arrangements.

**Limiting the Use of Punitive and Exclusionary Practices**

Schools attempted to limit the use of administrative consequences that are statutory, rule, or contract-based interventions done "to" an offender. Examples include teacher-assigned mandatory tutoring or detention, office discipline referrals, in-school suspension, and in-school intervention rooms. The vast majority of schools, more than 80%, tried to
use these punitive and exclusionary practices only as a “last resort,” after a variety of other approaches or interventions had been attempted, in cases involving a safety threat, or when time was needed to conduct an investigation. Several reported they were aware that their use of therapeutic or Restorative Practices in response to a typical incident (e.g. fighting) would not be used at other schools, where students would have received a suspension much more swiftly.

These schools largely considered punitive and exclusionary practices to be ineffective. An educator described, “We realized we’re punishing students over and over and over again. For example, if they were not getting their homework done they were getting a study hall and missing recess. We were creating behavior problems, we’re creating meltdowns.” Educators also wanted their students to stay in the school and the classroom as much as possible. They often highlighted the impact that missing classroom instruction had on student performance. They also found that removing students from the classroom or school did not resolve most root causes of challenging behaviors and that when students returned to school, the cycle repeated. Finally, they recognized that some students actually looked forward to suspensions as a “free day” to watch TV, play video games or hang out. A smaller number of educators also felt suspensions sent a message to staff, students and parents that the school was willing to “throw away” young people in its care. A school leader described an experience with an 8th grader,

“[He said], ‘what are you going to do, suspend me?’ [I said], ‘Of course we’re not going to send you home. We’re going to help you fix this.’ That is something that we value here at the school, the idea that we fix our problems, we don’t run away from them. We don’t just step away because they’re not going to magically get fixed. We tell the kids all the time that you are not going to leave; you will stay here and you will perform some kind of reparation. You don’t have an option of being sent home. We’re not going to throw you away. We care and we are going to work at it.”

When punitive or exclusionary practices were used, they rarely involved sending students home. Some schools had in-school intervention, suspension, or detention rooms which ranged widely in design and implementation. One particularly innovative approach was an intervention room created as a ‘support hub’ where students were connected to restorative counselors, mental health providers, and social-emotional support services. On the other hand, some schools found that having designated spaces where students were sent during the school day was self-fulfilling. These schools felt that by dedicating space and resources to in-school spaces schools were creating a culture where it was acceptable to remove students from the classroom. Schools that advocated against these types of space instead eliminated or transformed the school spaces where teachers historically sent challenging students. Removing benches, tables, rooms, or desks used to contain challenging students increased staff member’s use of alternatives like classroom-based interventions or specialized supports. A school leader from an innovation school said, “We’ve really tried to steer clear of
A detention and in-school suspension room. We really believe that designating a room for that sends the message to everyone that this is ok. And it's not.”

Awareness of Racial Inequalities and Bias in the Discipline Process
Many educators were uncomfortable talking about the role of race in their discipline process and emphasized that they treated all students “the same.” About a third of schools expressed a more race-conscious perspective and explicitly discussed their use of culturally responsive practices. Educators from these schools were familiar with issues of racial and socioeconomic inequality in education and the criminal justice system. Some described intentional efforts to identify and create awareness about racial bias in their teaching and discipline practices “not necessarily to solve it, but to be aware of it. Just the simple act of awareness created some changes in, not only in the grades and how kids were attaining, but also discipline.” With an understanding of the impact of racism and bias on students’ educational trajectories, these schools took responsibility for changing student academic and discipline outcomes, rather than blaming students or families: “It is not the student’s fault. [Racial disparities exist] because there is something wrong in our culture, there’s something wrong in our society, these children are set up from day one to fail. We as teachers must do whatever is necessary to change that; it is on us.”

Administrators and staff at these schools recognized that educators have too often marginalized families and students of color, and that intentional outreach and relationship building was therefore necessary to counter parents’ and students’ skepticism about fair treatment. “I intentionally make connections with Black boys and their parents right away” said one principal, and another shared, “we’ve worked incredibly hard with our Black and our Latino students to make sure that they feel respected and feel heard, feel loved.” Home visits were used to inform their understanding of parents’ past experiences with educators, “I think the home visits and the relationship with the parents [are key]. You don’t know what their parent’s experiences or history has been with teachers, public schools, private schools, White teachers or Black teachers.” When confronted with parent concerns about discrimination, administrators took the concerns seriously and discussed them openly with parents. Reflecting on changes in discipline practices at her site, a principal shared that “There were certain families here at our school that had a really bad taste in their mouth about how their kids had been treated. I had to meet with families [who felt] that the kids of color at our school would get punished for certain things that other kids would not.”

These participants also shared an understanding that in previous schools, educators may have had lower expectations for Black students. They saw high quality and engaging instruction in all classrooms as an important approach to supporting Black students in particular, who may have been under-challenged in the past. As an elementary principal described, “Hopefully our focus on quality instruction is where we’re seeing a difference [for our students of color]. We’ve really asked for all students to be engaged
in learning.” Finally, school administrators also discussed the importance of having staff members who mirror the diversity of the student body and can be school-based role models to students of color.

Supportive Conditions for Robust Implementation
Schools reported that it was difficult to get everyone in the building to implement school-wide expectations. Over half of schools reported that some of their educators inconsistently followed the discipline or behavior protocols. As a result, school leaders used training and coaching, strategic hiring, and teams of student services providers to ensure high quality implementation of their systems, strategies, and protocols.

Professional Learning
One of the most important conditions that supported school’s efforts to implement effective discipline practices was sustained professional learning for school staff. A focus group participant from a charter elementary school observed, “You need that support, additional training, coaching to be able to implement at a consistent level, never mind at a high level.” Professional learning was viewed by the vast majority of participants as crucial to maintaining high fidelity to the school’s behavior or discipline practices and policies. Several schools made an intentional effort to include every staff person in their building in trainings on behavior or discipline - from front office staff and paraprofessionals and safety professionals to custodians.

Administrators reported these adults “have their ear to the ground all the time” and need to be empowered to talk to students about their behavior, echoing the sentiment described in the school culture section that everyone is responsible for all of their students.

Participants discussed two main formats for professional learning: formal training and informal coaching. Formal trainings included staff retreats, professional development units, book clubs, staff or grade-level meetings, and in-house or district-led workshops. These trainings were most often held the week before school started for the year and on non-student contact days reserved for professional learning throughout the year. Formal trainings, especially retreats, were used to recommit staff to school mission, culture, or values. A particularly innovative and flexible approach to professional learning was to allow school staff to choose among several professional learning options aligned with the school’s vision for school culture, behavior and discipline.
Accountability

Mechanisms to hold staff members accountable to school-wide expectations emerged as another condition of high fidelity implementation. Accountability was enacted by administrators and teachers providing feedback to one another, following through with plans and goals, and recognizing successes. At the core of accountability was having clear expectations for the process and follow-up with staff who did not adhere to it. Teachers held each other accountable by encouraging new strategies and checking in about protocol breaches with one another. Importantly, accountability was not a punitive process, but rather an opportunity for an administrator or peer to offer support and ideas about “how to better deal with those circumstances or how to better work with certain populations of our school.” These strategies were woven into informal coaching conversations as well as all-school faculty meetings. Informal coaching involved feedback and consultation to individual staff members, usually by an administrator, but in some cases by peers. It typically entailed observations of teachers followed by a check-in where alternative strategies and specialized training opportunities were discussed. At times these coaching sessions were initiated when a staff member did not follow the discipline policy or protocol. Coaching gave administrators the opportunity to provide more tailored and specific guidance for teachers based on their unique strengths, challenges, and classroom dynamics or configurations. A handful of schools used teaching evaluations systems that include assessments of the learning environment, including the district system (LEAP), to initiate coaching on classroom management. Frequent classrooms observations were characteristics of several schools, allowing greater opportunities for coaching and feedback. Dedicating time for observations and feedback therefore served an important role in establishing norms around discipline.

Strategic Hiring for Mission, Values & Culture Fit

A portion of our interviews and focus groups involved questions about how school’s leveraged their hiring practices to meet the district’s discipline goals. Most schools said they hired people who demonstrated alignment with their school’s staff and student culture, core values, or discipline philosophies. Commonly cited characteristics included: 1) capacity for relationship building; 2) belief in all students’ potential; 3) a commitment to meeting the needs of all types of children; and, 4) responsiveness to feedback. A secondary school leader said, “I find people who care about kids. That’s a big shift for me. The
first year here I tried to hire the best content teachers. This year I just went out looking for people who are going to love our kids.” Participants also described how they used differing hiring practices to find high quality candidates who had these traits. In writing samples or initial interviews, schools asked questions about their approach to building relationships, beliefs about students, and commitment to equity or inclusion. For example, one school asked candidates to “relate to a story, personal or professional, where the value of all kids was taken into account.” Another asked, “How has your own race and class privilege tied into your success?” How applicants responded to such questions indicated their fit with the school’s mission. “If someone’s willing to say, ‘I don’t know, I’ve never thought about that, let me unpack this,’ that’s who we want in front of our kids. Someone that says, ‘That’s not a thing’ [is not] the best fit for our culture.” One charter school even utilized an empirically-validated survey to screen applicants for mission and culture fit, called the Haberman Foundation’s Star Teacher Questionnaire, described by a focus group participant as “a screener for teachers who will work well in urban environments.” After preliminary screens, schools further assessed fit with school culture through observations, demonstrations, mock meetings, and scenarios. For example, a few schools assessed the trait of a growth mindset by having applicants incorporate or respond to feedback from observers.

**Availability of School-Based Student Services**

Schools of all types attributed their success in meeting district goals to strong, site-based student services that were provided by a wide range and mix of professionals from a variety of disciplines, including mental health (school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists), school culture (deans or administrative assistants, restorative counselors, social-emotional learning coordinators), specialists (academic or behavioral interventionists, physical therapists, paraprofessionals), and others (family liaisons, social services, recess coaches). These adult rich environments supported robust implementation of school-wide systems and inclusive protocols for responding to misbehavior:

“We’re able catch kids before they fall. To have three interventionists on-site for a school of 360 kids is excellent. That doesn’t include myself [psychologist], that doesn’t include our special educator, our speech language pathologist, our OT, who also work to help provide classroom-based supports.”

Many described the importance of having student support services every day of the week so that providers would be able to “see patterns” and “really get to know the students.” When that was not possible, schools pieced together part-time positions to have supports every day of the school week. Schools often built out these supports with their own budgets, supplemented by fundraisers or parent donations, or grants and community partnerships with organizations like City Year, Playworks, Uplift, GREAT, and Denver Mental Health.

**District Resources**

We asked participants to talk about their experiences with Denver Public School district partners, policies, programs, funding or other supports in relation to meeting school discipline goals. Educators identified several strengths in district-level supports, but also areas of improvement. Funding for site-based student services through the mental health expansion grants were highlighted as the most useful. The availability of discipline partners to answer specific questions about discipline incidents and how they should be addressed, was another area of strength for the district,
along with professional development and trainings support. Areas of improvement include district-wide discipline meetings, long-term funding, and ease or timeliness of communications with district partners.

Dedicated Funding

Participants from about half of the schools identified district funding dedicated to site-based student services as a critical resource provided by the district. Funding for home-visit programs and mental health expansion grants was often cited as helpful in meeting the discipline goals. Time-limited funding created difficulties in sustaining reforms, however: “The .5 expansion on mental health support that was granted to me was awesome. The challenge with the way our structure is [that] once schools start doing well they stop giving you funds.” Conversely, about half of schools reported needing additional support for school social workers, school psychologists, restorative justice coordinators, and other student support staff. Several administrators shared disappointment about the 1-day mental health support provided by the district and felt, especially in highly impacted schools, that two full time staff members were needed. Many observed that the district’s current emphasis on site-based budgeting, without dedicated lines of funding for student services, indicated that the district was not serious about discipline reforms, or did not value positive behavior and school culture systems.

Professional Learning and Trainings

Many schools found professional development units or other trainings led by the district on equity and inclusion, Restorative Practices, and culturally responsive education to be helpful resources in their efforts to meet discipline goals. About a third of schools referenced the district-wide Discipline Building Leaders (DBL) meetings during interviews or focus groups. Several participants found the meetings to be helpful, especially content on racial disparities and equity in the discipline process. An elementary school administrator said, “[If] they had never mentioned the inequity in Black males being suspended versus everybody else, I might have just said ‘okay, it’s on the discipline ladder, they were fighting, that’s a suspension, we need to teach them a lesson.’ I’ll give the district credit for raising my awareness.”

However, the majority of participants who referenced the DBL meetings said they did not attend because the content was not tailored to their grade-level, governance type, or school network. Others, especially those from schools with small administrative teams, found it difficult to participate in the meetings during regular school hours, but expressed an interest in attending if
other time options were made available. Increasing the relevancy of meeting content and the use of experiential facilitation methods were other recommendations for improvement. Several charter schools expressed a desire for additional clarification about their responsibilities and legal or policy obligations related to discipline, including whether or not they should attend the DBL meetings. One educator even suggested that staff get training from the district on anything that’s “mandated” by law or policy. As one charter school administrator observed, “because charter schools and district schools are so separated, in instances where a student brings a weapon to school where we have to follow [district] protocol, we don’t know what that protocol is because we’re not required to go to any of those trainings. We could do a better job of working together.”

**Consultations with District Partners**

Contacting OSEL and discipline partners was a commonly mentioned district resource. In particular, educators found it helpful to work with OSEL network partners and discipline coordinators as thought partners for developing interventions when misbehavior escalated to an office discipline referral. Administrators often contacted district discipline coordinators when they weren’t sure how to apply district policy to a particular incident. As one principal said, “I have conversations with [a district discipline coordinator] all the time to just bounce ideas off of” and as another charter school dean said, “I’ve always been able to reach out and say, ‘hey I have this situation how do you think I should handle it?’...so it’s not fun but I’ve always felt there’s been support.”

At the same time, participants also identified areas of improvement for district partners. One suggestion was to improve clarity about who to contact for different types of support. Many administrators were not sure who to contact because of changes in district positions, responsibilities and phone numbers. Navigating district support systems was challenging even for principals who had worked in the district for many years who said they were “starting to find it harder and harder to get through the layers because the players have changed.” A second suggestion was to improve communication response times between district partners and school staff. Some educators reported that their calls, particularly those related to Special Education, led to dead ends or were not responded to quickly enough to be useful.

Other schools felt that rather than helping schools develop interventions or connect to additional resources, their support partners approached them as though they were not doing enough for their students. As one principal described, “What I feel on a regular bases is frustration, ‘You didn’t do enough for this kid…You need to try harder you need to be innovative you need to think outside of the box.’” From this, a final suggestion was for support partners to refrain from blaming school personnel for discipline incidents and approach the work more collaboratively. While administrators agreed that additional efforts to support students on their end were necessary, they felt additional funding, services, or resources from the district were needed to do so.
The research literature on effective school discipline provides support for many of the factors and approaches described by Denver educators in this report. The strongest evidence exists for relationship building; school-wide, positive, and restorative systems; discipline or behavior protocols that limit the use of punitive and exclusionary practices; and debiasing interventions.

Racial and Socioeconomic Integration
Many studies have documented a relationship between school racial and socioeconomic composition and discipline outcomes (Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). Schools serving predominantly students of color and students from low-income backgrounds tend to use punitive discipline sanctions more widely and have larger racial disparities in suspension and expulsion (Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). These patterns are partially explained by characteristics of highly segregated schools: limited capacity for parent fundraising, unequal school funding, less access to highly qualified teachers, and the concentration of security guards or police officers (Arcia, 2007; Eitle & Eitle, 2004).

School-Wide Positive Behavior and School Culture Systems
The emphasis on school-wide expectations and systems reported by educators in focus groups and interviews is consistent with previous research on effective school discipline. School-wide and teacher-focused interventions are among the most effective approaches for improving student behavioral outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Successful approaches to discipline are characterized by preventative, collaborative, and instructional strategies that coordinate school- and classroom-level supports (Skiba & Peterson, 2010). A multi-tiered framework that involves defining and teaching expectations, reinforcing positive behavior, redirecting unacceptable behavior, and managing repeated or serious rule violations consistently throughout the building has proven to be especially effective in reducing discipline incidents (Simonsen, et al., 2015).

Relationship Building
Establishing authentic, supportive relationships is a key lever in creating a positive school climate, minimizing problem behaviors, and reducing racial discipline gaps (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). The warm-strict approach to relationships is well supported in the literature as a strategy for building positive relationships with students (Bondy & Ross, 2008). Relationships with students of color are especially important for teachers to develop because such students often have felt less safe among, and connected to, adults in schools (Voight, Hanson, O’ Malley, & Adekanye, 2015). A recent study in DPS documented the same pattern; Black, Latino, Asian, and Multiracial students in the district all felt less care, concern, encouragement, and emotional availability from school adults than their White counterparts (Anyon, Zhang, & Hazel, 2016).
**Restorative Practices**

Multiple studies suggest that Restorative Practices can reduce office discipline referrals and suspensions, improve school climate and teacher-student interactions, reduce racial disparities in suspension, and even improve academic outcomes (Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014; McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al. 2008; Teske, 2011; Schiff, 2013) Recent research conducted in Denver Public Schools also finds that the use of Restorative Practices can reduce a student’s risk for an out-of-school suspension (Anyon et al., 2014; Gonzalez, 2011)

**Behavioral Recognitions and Rewards**

Several studies have demonstrated that implementation of school-wide systems of expectations, rewards, and recognition lead to reduced discipline incidents (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Mukuria, 2002; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). In the schools we studied, school-wide systems were typically premised upon providing positive reinforcements for desired behavior through incentive programs and rewards, a strategy consistent in other low-suspending schools (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Christie, et al, 2004; Raffael Mendez, Knoff, Ferron, 2002).

**Social Emotional Skill Building**

The emphasis on social emotional skill building among schools that met the district’s discipline goals is consistent with studies of other low-suspending schools in which social emotional programs are used as part of an overall response strategy aimed at meeting student’s needs, rather than relying on punishment (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000; Raffael Mendez, Knoff, Ferron, 2002).

**Inclusive Policies and Protocols for Responding to Misbehavior**

Recognizing the subjective nature of the district discipline policy, several schools perceived incidents that could have been interpreted as zero-tolerance infractions -- necessitating suspension—as contextually-bound interactions that fell into grey areas in the district’s discipline policy. Such an interpretation tended to result in supporting students rather than automatically punishing them. This flexible interpretation of district policy is consistent with studies on low-suspending schools, whereas high suspending schools tend to adopt a black-and-white interpretation of discipline policies (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000). District and school leaders may do well to decide on a shared interpretation or extent to which directives on the discipline ladder may be negotiated.

**Classroom-based interventions**

Many schools in this study made it a clear priority that educators to resolve discipline incidents in the classroom using graduated, tiered responses. Following basic classroom strategies to resolve misbehavior, teachers would seek additional supports from colleagues and use data-collection and reflection strategies to direct subsequent intervention strategies. Most office referrals originate in the classroom (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). It is fitting then, that schools in this study emphasized a “classroom-first” intervention approach. The use of a graduated approach that proceeds from universal supports to more specialized, student-specific,
data-driven interventions is nearly identical to the process modeled in Response to Intervention (RtI), a national model used to improve the accuracy with which students are identified for increasingly intensive instructional supports and special education services (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2010). The systematic decision-making approach undergirding RtI reduces the unnecessary identification of students without disabilities (VanderHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007).

**Student Support Services**

Part of the graduated response to discipline used by educators in this study included referring students for social and emotional support services with school-based mental health providers such as psychologists and social workers. While research on the direct effects of school-based providers is limited, available recommendations suggest that these professionals can support discipline reforms by advocating for students’ well-being, offering trainings for staff, and educating staff about the consequences of suspension and use of alternative form of discipline (Cameron, 2006; Daresbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010).

**Proactive and Inclusive Discipline Protocols**

There is no research evidence supporting the use of suspension as an effective strategy for changing student behavior (Skiba, Shure, Middelberg & Baker, 2011.) Schools in this study typically had established a general process for responding to misbehavior that focused on early prevention and graduated supportive interventions with limited use of punitive practices. The last-resort approach to exclusionary practices effectively takes the option off the table, creating positive pressure for educators to innovate new ways of intervening and responding to students. Such an approach is consistent with study findings from other low-suspending schools which typically emphasized prevention and services over exclusion (Skiba et al., 2014; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000; Mukuria, 2002; Christie et al 2004).

**Awareness of Racial Inequalities and Bias**

Despite the potential for school-wide systems to reduce the overall number of discipline incidents, they alone will not reduce racial disparities (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding 2010; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Rather, reducing racial disparities requires a race-conscious approach that recognizes the role of racism and racial stereotyping in discipline processes (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014) and that uses culturally relevant frameworks as part of a school-wide approach (Jones, Caravaca, Cizek, Horner, & Vincent, 2006; Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Braday, 2011). A limited number of schools in this study explicitly discussed race and racism. In schools, biases are enacted towards students of color through educators’ nonverbal criticism and lowered expectations, less favorable treatment in classrooms, and presumptions of criminality (Casteel, 1998; LaVonne, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003; Blair 2001; Ferguson, 2000; Monroe, 2006; Pinnow, 2013; Simpson, & Erickson, 1983). Implicit biases are pervasive and people are particularly vulnerable to act upon them in high-pressure, time constrained decision-making (Staats, 2014). Despite their pervasiveness, implicit biases are malleable and can be reduced through evidence-based strategies such as role-playing, extended time for decision-making,
promoting empathy and connections to racially different groups, countering stereotyped assumptions, and explicating implicit biases through deliberate processing (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; McGregor, 1993; Paluck & Green, 2009; Staats, 2014). Several schools in this study also mentioned the importance of academic rigor, engagement, high expectations and high supports for minimizing racial disparities. High expectations for student learning and performance, with caring adult relationships, has shown great promise for reducing office discipline referrals and suspensions for Black students in particular (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011).

Conditions that Support Robust Implementation

Introducing new discipline approaches to school staff and ensuring they are utilized consistently is challenging. However, there is strong evidence about two key conditions that school leaders can create to promote robust implementation.

Professional Learning

Professional learning opportunities were frequently mentioned by participants as a necessary condition for high quality implementation of discipline and behavior systems. Research also indicates that the amount and quality of training and technical assistance, including consultation and coaching, is associated with higher program fidelity in school settings (Payne et al., 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2013). In fact, schools with low rates of suspension tend to provide more staff development and training and more varied ways of reducing and preventing misbehavior (Raffael Mendez, Knoff, Ferron, 2002). Just as students need opportunities to develop their skill sets, so too school staff benefit from opportunities to hone social and emotional skills (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). Certain kinds of professional development may directly impact the racial discipline gap. Teacher training programs to improve relationships between teachers and students showed benefits to reducing suspension rates overall, but especially for Black students (Gregory et al. 2012).

Accountability

Study participants reported that adopting new discipline approaches required school staff to encourage and support each other, but also provide critical and timely feedback to individuals who do not follow protocol. Other studies have found that school leaders can help staff overcome resistance to new systems by being willing to expose their own vulnerabilities and areas of growth, facilitating shared decision-making, and focusing on staff relationships (Harris, 2005; Zimmerman, 2006). These strategies comprise the approach of distributed or shared leadership (Bolden, 2011). Distributed leadership has been shown to be effective in implementing school reform, largely with respect to academic achievement and performance (Bolden, 2011). However, the key strategies such as a focus on relationships, creating an environment where learning is valued among staff, and a collaborative school culture are all aligned with themes reported by participants in the interviews and focus groups.

District Resources

The research evidence on how districts can positively impact discipline is limited; but studies suggest district-wide investments into social-emotional supports and replace suspension with learner-
centered approaches can result in drastic reductions in the frequency of behavioral incidents (Cornell & Lovegrove, 2013). Additionally, district resources should also focus on empowering principals to adopt aspects of distributed leadership within their school, adopting a more “coaching” focused model with principals. Studies show this practice is effective in support principals (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014) and includes such strategies as joining and working with principals to create and sustain change, personalizing support tailored to the needs of the principal, modeling skills, tools, and techniques, providing tools, and brokering for resources (Honig, 2012). As with principals promoting change within their school by personalizing services and empowering teachers, district staff should employ similar strategies when partnering with principals. Many techniques available to accomplish this, however solution focused approaches and motivational interviewing appear to be particularly impactful. Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an approach to communication and engagement rooted in change and “it is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal” (Miller & Rollnick, 2012 pg. 29 as cited by Frey, Sims, & Alvarez, 2013). Solution focused approaches shift perspective to concentrate time and attention towards what is working or when things have been going well (Kelly, Liscio, Bluestone-Miller & Shilts, 2011). Both solution-focused approaches are well supported in theoretical literature and literature about change in schools and classrooms (Frey et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2011). As such, it is recommended that when engaging with principals (or coaching principals to engage with their staff) positive, solution focused approaches are used with an eye towards change employing MI techniques.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are focused on themes from this report that were consistent across our qualitative and quantitative data, and/or are supported by prior research:

Schools. Robustly implement key strategies outlined in this report:

- Engage all school staff in ongoing professional learning about universal strategies for relationship-building, proactive classroom management approaches, equity frameworks, and implicit bias.
- Establish and provide training for school staff on inclusive and proactive discipline or behavior protocols.
- Collaboratively (re)establish and teach school-wide expectations for students and staff members every school year, with regular opportunities for recognition of positive behavior.
- Greet students and implement social-emotional learning or community building activities at the start of the school day.
- Participate in the Parent-Teacher Home Visit program.
- Use Restorative Practices to address low-level misbehavior and resolve more serious discipline incidents.
- Allocate funds from site-based budgets, fundraise, and write grants to provide a wide variety of site-based student support services.
The District. Create high expectations, high support, and high accountability conditions that encourage more schools to implement the strategies outlined in this report:

- Strengthen initiatives that promote racially and socioeconomically integrated schools, such as high quality schools in every neighborhood, and transportation for students who choice-in to schools outside of their community.
- Expand the Parent-Teacher Home Visit program to a greater number of schools, prioritizing those with high suspension rates.
- Increase the availability of engaging and tailored site- or network-based training and consultation on Equity, PBIS, and Restorative Practices.
- Develop consistent strategies for recognizing and rewarding schools who use Restorative Practices in response to discipline incidents, reduce their suspension rates, and/or minimize racial suspension gaps over time. Incorporate these measures into the School Performance Framework.
- Provide training and consultation on evidence-based classroom management approaches like Responsive Classroom.
- Conduct a needs assessments of schools that have consistently been unable to meet the district’s discipline goals.
- Leverage mill levy funds in support of all types of school-based service providers, including social workers and psychologists, but also Restorative Practices counselors and Social-Emotional Learning coordinators.
- Re-introduce and provide sustained financial support for the “mental health expansion grant” to provide additional school-based student services at sites with high suspension rates.
- Provide consultants, workshops, or network-based mentoring for principals in highly impacted schools to receive support with fundraising, grant-writing, and site-based budgeting in support of the strategies outlined in this report.
- Encourage Instructional Superintendents to advocate that principals utilize district-offered training and consultation on Equity, Restorative Practices, PBIS, and evidence-based classroom management approaches.
- Train district partners who provide consultations to schools in solution-focused coaching and motivational interviewing.
Tables

Table 1: Qualitative School Sample Characteristics for the 2014-2015 School Year.
The qualitative sample is a sub-set of schools that met the district’s discipline goals and had at least 1\% of the student body that identified as Black (n=33). A larger number of schools (n=81) met the district’s discipline goals, but had very few, if any, Black students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Sample (n=33)</th>
<th>All Other Schools (n=167)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Configuration</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% Elementary Schools</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-Traditional Schools (e.g. K-8, 6-12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Middle Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>% High Schools</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Management Type</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>% District-Managed Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Charter Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Innovation Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Composition</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean School Size</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Students of Color</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Eligible for Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with Disabilities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number of stars next to a value indicates statistical significance, or the probability (a form of mathematical confidence), that the differences in the means or percentages of between these two groups of schools is not random in a district of this size. *p < .10, ** p <.05, ***p <.01, ****p <.001
Table 2: Descriptive comparison of all Schools that met the district's discipline goals and those that did not during the 2014-2015 school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Suspending Schools (n=81)</th>
<th>Others (n=119)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% or mean</td>
<td>% or mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Configuration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Elementary Schools</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-Traditional Schools (e.g. K-8, 6-12)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Middle Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% High Schools</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% District-Managed Schools</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Charter Schools</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Innovation Schools</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean School Size</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Students of Color</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>83****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Latino</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>63****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Multiracial</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Asian &amp; Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Eligible for Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>78****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with Disabilities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Statistical analysis of factors associated with meeting district discipline goals during the 2014-2015 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Suspending Schools (n=81)</th>
<th>Others (n=119)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% or mean</td>
<td>% or mean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discipline Rates**

- % of Student Population with Serious Discipline Incidents: 5 % vs. 15 ****%
- % of Student Population Suspended: 1 % vs. 8 ****%
- Mean Racial Discipline Gap: 0 % vs. 7 ****%

**Consequences for Disciplined Students**

- % Suspended: 32 % vs. 55 ****%
- % Students Referred to Support Services: 26 % vs. 28 %
- % Received RPs: 21 % vs. 16 *
- % Suspended In-School: 22 % vs. 30 **%
- % Behavior Contract: 4 % vs. 4 %
- % In-School Intervention Room: 2 % vs. 5 *
- % Referred to Law Enforcement: 2 % vs. 4 **

*The number of stars next to a value indicates statistical significance, or the probability (a form of statistical confidence), that the differences in the means or percentages of between these two groups of schools is not random in a district of this size. *p < .10, ** p <.05, ***p <.01, ****p <.001

Table 3: Statistical analysis of factors associated with meeting district discipline goals during the 2014-2015 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood of meeting district goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of Student Population Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Student Population with Serious Discipline Incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Disciplined Students Suspended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Disciplined Students Suspended In-School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Disciplined Students who Received RPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Only statistically significant results are presented. This analysis also accounted for grade-level, proportion of students with disabilities, proportion of students who are limited English proficient, governance type, use of in-school intervention room and law enforcement referrals.

+/- A negative or positive sign indicates the direction of the relationship.

# The numerical value represents the magnitude of the relationship between a school feature and meeting the district’s discipline goals.

*The number of stars next to a value indicates statistical significance, or the probability (a form of mathematical confidence), that the relationship between school features and a school's likelihood of meeting the district’s discipline goals is not random in a district of this size. *p < .10, ** p <.05, ***p <.01, ****p <.001
Resources
The following websites provide additional information about some of the strategies discussed in this report.

Effective School Discipline:
- [http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/](http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/)

Discipline Disparities:
- [https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/](https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/)
- [http://www.indiana.edu/~equityiu/](http://www.indiana.edu/~equityiu/)

Growth Mindset:

JK-R:
- [https://www.dpsk12.org/pdf/Executive_Summary_English.pdf](https://www.dpsk12.org/pdf/Executive_Summary_English.pdf)

SWPBIS (School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports): [https://www.pbis.org/](https://www.pbis.org/)


Responsive Classroom: [https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/](https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/)


References


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1 The proportion of students eligible for free and reduced lunch in a school constituted the indicator of both racial and socioeconomic segregation in the statistical model. These two demographic features of school composition were so strongly related to each other they could not be disentangled. In other words, the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced lunch is so highly correlated with the percentage of students of color in a school (.94) that they essentially measure the same phenomenon. We therefore ran models separately, with either percent free and reduced lunch or percent students of color, and the results were fundamentally identical in terms of the direction and statistical significance of each covariate.
Module 5: Restorative Practices & Relationship Building
Restorative Interventions and School Discipline Sanctions in a Large Urban School District

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*University of Denver*

Anne Gregory  
*Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey*

Susan Stone  
*University of California, Berkeley*

Jordan Farrar  

Jeffrey M. Jenson  

Jeanette McQueen  
*University of Denver*

Barbara Downing  

Eldridge Greer  

John Simmons  
*Denver Public Schools*

A *large urban district* (\(N = 90,546\) students, \(n = 180\) schools) implemented restorative interventions as a response to school discipline incidents. Findings from multilevel modeling of student discipline records (\(n = 9,921\)) revealed that youth from groups that tend to be overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions (e.g., Black, Latino, and Native American youth; boys; and students in special education) had similar, if not greater, rates of participation in restorative interventions than their peers. First-semester participants in restorative interventions had lower odds of receiving office discipline referrals (OR .21, \(p < .001\)) and suspensions (OR .07, \(p < .001\)) in the second semester. However, the suspension gap between Black and White students persisted. Implications for reform in school discipline practices are noted.

**Keywords:** office discipline referral, restorative intervention, restorative justice, school discipline, suspension

A collective challenge to conventional wisdom about school discipline has been issued at local, state, and federal levels. No longer is it assumed that suspension should remain the “go to” response to student misconduct.
and school safety concerns. A growing body of evidence indicates that exclusionary discipline practices, such as out-of-school suspension (OSS) and expulsion, are not effective or equitable approaches to improving student behavior and school safety (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). School officials also recognize that aggregated discipline rates obscure disparities between student groups. Many educators are now scrutinizing their

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Susan Stone is the Catherine Mary and Eileen Clare Hutto Professor of Social Services in Public Education. Her work is focused on social work in education and its impact on the academic progress of vulnerable youth in schools.

Jordan Farrar is a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. Her teaching and research interests include youth involved in armed conflict, restorative justice and indigenous healing practices, and global social work research.

Jeffrey M. Jenson is the Philip D. & Eleanor G. Winn Professor for Children and Youth at Risk at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. His teaching and research interests address the etiology and prevention of childhood and adolescent problems of bullying, aggression, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency.

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Barbara Downing is a district partner in the Office of Social-Emotional Learning at Denver Public Schools. She is responsible for monitoring the implementation of district discipline policy, improving student information system technology, and training and facilitating of school staff.

Eldridge Greer is the associate chief of student equity and opportunity at Denver Public Schools, where his focus is removing structural barriers that negatively impact educational opportunity. He has been nationally recognized for his work in Denver for discipline reform efforts, with a particular focus on eliminating the racial disparities in discipline.

John Simmons is the former associate chief of the Division of Student Services at Denver Public Schools. He oversaw division decision-making on resource allocation, policy, professional development opportunities, and assessment and monitoring systems.
data to detect disproportionality along the lines of student race, gender, and special education status (e.g., Public Schools of North Carolina, 2013).

Indeed, there is consensus among many researchers, policy makers, educators, and school-based mental health professionals that exclusionary school discipline practices rarely improve school safety and, in fact, exacerbate racial inequalities in education and incarceration. In 2014 alone, national reports about school discipline were issued from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), the Council of State Governments Justice Center (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014), and the Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014). The reports converge in their recommendations to reduce suspension through alternative practices that have a greater chance of changing student behavior, keeping youth in school, and maintaining a positive school climate.

These recent calls for change reflect evidence that suspension has deleterious effects on student well-being and school safety. Schools with high rates of suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement referrals are perceived by students, teachers, and parents to be less safe than other schools (Osher, Poirier, Jarjoura, & Brown, 2014; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2014). Moreover, youth who have been suspended or expelled are more likely than students who do not receive disciplinary sanctions to be pushed out of school and into criminal justice systems; this process is often referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Fabelo et al., 2011; Rausch, Skiba, & Simmons, 2004; Skiba et al., 2014). For instance, a longitudinal study of Florida ninth graders found that each suspension decreased students’ odds of graduating high school by an additional 20% and decreased their odds of enrolling in postsecondary schooling by 12% (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015). Moreover, a Texas statewide study found that students suspended or expelled for a discretionary school violation were about three times more likely than other youth to have contact with the juvenile justice system in the next school year (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Patterns of dropout and juvenile justice involvement are of particular concern given racial disparities in exclusionary school discipline outcomes. Latino, Native American, and Black youth are significantly more likely than students of other backgrounds to be referred to school administrators for discipline problems and to receive OSS, expulsion, or a referral to law enforcement as punishment (Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013; Payne & Welch, 2010). These students tend to be disciplined more harshly than White students for the same type and number of offenses (Anyon et al., 2014; Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010) but are less likely to have access to much needed support services (Reyes, Elias, Parker, & Rosenblatt, 2013). The interlocking nature of the discipline, achievement, and incarceration gaps suggests that, over the long term, whole groups of students who are disproportionately suspended and have lower
achievement are less likely to obtain a range of positive life outcomes (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

Concerns about equity and the detrimental effects of suspension have driven educators to seek alternatives to traditional suspension practices and policies. The U.S. Departments of Education (DOE, 2014) and Justice recommend that students should not only be held accountable for conduct but should also have opportunities to learn from discipline incidents and build social and emotional skills. They note that schools may decide to use restorative interventions (RIs) to enhance and teach a range of individual skills. Similarly, the Council of State Governments Justice Center (Morgan et al., 2014) suggests that after conflict or rule infractions, educators should utilize a “restorative follow-up.” The follow-up, they explain, provides students with opportunities to discuss incidents, accept responsibility for harmful actions, and identify ways to repair harm. Recommendations from these reports reflect a wave of initiatives sweeping the United States (following the lead of many other countries such as New Zealand, Australia, and England) in which schools have implemented RIs as alternatives to suspension (Drewery, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2008; Schiff, 2013). Despite reduced suspension rates in individual schools and descriptive accounts of improvements in districts that implement RIs (e.g., Encarnacao, 2013; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Schiff, 2013; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006), multivariate analyses of implementation data that account for between-school variability and the nature of student offenses are rare and have not been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Restorative Interventions

Arising from a humanist philosophy and with historical roots in a range of diverse cultures (e.g., Native American, Maori) and religions (e.g., Judaism), restorative approaches assume that subjective experiences of harmful acts need to be acknowledged and that it is worthwhile to harness the power of the collective for resolution and repair (Drewery, 2013; Zehr, 2002; Zehr & Toews, 2004). Restorative approaches to school discipline include a variety of practices on the prevention-intervention continuum. Namely, some practices aim to prevent infractions and other practices intervene after infractions have occurred (e.g., Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; McCluskey et al., 2008; Wachtel, Costello, & Wachtel, 2009). At the intervention end of the continuum, restorative approaches have two core features: (a) Those affected by an infraction or crime come together to identify how people were impacted by the incident, and (b) they jointly problem-solve and identify actions that will repair the harm (Coates, Umbreit, & Vos, 2003; McGarrell & Hipple, 2007).

In essence, RIs are problem-solving processes held in a small conference or a larger circle format, which may include people affected by the incident.
directly and indirectly. Typically, conferences for serious incidents follow a formal procedure. First, a preconference meeting is held whereby a facilitator meets with a disputant to orient him or her to restorative approaches. At this meeting, a disputant can decline to participate in an RI or a facilitator can determine a conference is not appropriate if the disputant will not accept any responsibility or acknowledge his or her role in the incident and/or is not willing to repair the harm (Wachtel, O’Connell, & Wachtel, 2010). Second, if the conference is to proceed, a range of parties are invited to voluntarily attend, including the disputant, the disputant’s supporters, and all those negatively impacted by the incident (McCluskey et al., 2008).

Third, in the conference itself, participants sit in a circle facing one another, and a facilitator uses a structured set of questions to guide the exchange among all the participants. The goal is for everyone (including the victim and the disputant) to voice their perspectives. The set of questions facilitate reflection on the link between actions and subsequent consequences. Typical questions include the following: “What happened?”; “Who has been harmed/affected by what you have done?”; “What part are you responsible for?”; and “How will the harm be repaired?” (Teachers Unite, 2014). Questions also solicit sharing of the emotional experience of the incident to further empathy and understanding (Nathanson, 1997; Wachtel et al., 2010).

Fourth, the participants jointly develop a plan to repair the harm and prevent future incidents. The aim is to hold disputants accountable for breaching trust with the community and at the same time reintegrate those students back into the community (Braithwaite, 1989, 2001; Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010). Agreements to repair the harm can take many forms, including the disputant making amends through his or her actions (e.g., community service or repair damaged property). Typically, agreements are written down and agreed upon by all conference participants.

**RIs and Positive Outcomes**

Most prior research on restorative practices has examined school-wide reductions in office discipline referrals (ODRs) and OSSs using single group, pre-, and posttest designs (Schiff, 2013). These studies lack comparison groups and seldom use any statistical controls to account for potential confounders. That said, numerous international studies have reported reductions in school-wide ODRs and OSS rates after restorative practices were introduced, including in New Zealand (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007), Scotland (Kane et al., 2007), and China (Wong & Mok, 2011). Studies of school-based restorative practices in the United States have shown similar declines, including in Denver, Colorado (González, 2015), Minneapolis, Minnesota (Riestenberg, 2013), and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Lewis, 2009). In addition, in Oakland, CA, the suspension rate of Black students declined at a sharper rate than the suspension rate of White students after
the introduction of a range of interventions including restorative approaches
to discipline, Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports, and the
Manhood Development Program (Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014). In
Denver, during years when RIs initially spread to schools throughout the dis-

trict, González (2015) reported a 4 percentage point decrease in the Black/
White suspension gap. These trends are only suggestive of the promise for
restorative approaches to reduce exclusionary practices and narrow the
racial discipline gap.

Findings from experimental research addressing student outcomes
resulting from school-based conferences have yet to be published. How-
ever, research on adult and youth restorative conferencing in the crim-
nal justice system suggests that similar programming in school settings may
be beneficial. Randomized controlled trials in the United States, Australia,
and Great Britain, in which juvenile offenders were assigned to restorative
conferences, other diversion programs, or typical court procedures, have
found that some restorative conference programs have the ability to reduce
rates of reoffense, whereas other programs have no long-term effects on
reoffending (Larsen, 2014; Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005). Specifically,
Strang, Sherman, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, and Ariel (2013) analyzed results
from 10 controlled trials on three continents with a total of 1,879 offenders
and 734 interviewed victims. Their results showed that among cases in which
both offenders and victims were willing to meet, restorative justice conferen-
ces reduced future crime. That said, using propensity score matching with
samples of youth offenders in Australia, Smith and Weatherburn (2012)
revealed no difference in future offense rates between youth who partici-
pated in a conference and those who participated in a business-as-usual con-
dition. Further, although a controlled trial in Indianapolis found that
participants randomly assigned to conferencing or to other diversion pro-
gramming experienced short-term benefits in terms of reduced rates of reof-
fense after 2 years (McGarrell & Hipple 2007), the benefits were not
sustained in a 10-year follow-up (Jeong, McGarrell, & Hipple, 2012). The
researchers conclude that conferences may result in short-term (not long-
term) reduction in risk.

The experimental literature from juvenile justice suggests that research
on both distal and proximal outcomes of school-based RIs are needed.
Moreover, research on the impact of RIs in educational settings is warranted
because of the unique dynamics of school environments compared to com-

munity systems. For example, it is possible that the impact of RIs on youth
outcomes could be stronger than what has been found from criminal justice
studies. In schools, it is likely that RIs are used with a much more diverse
group of young people with lower risk profiles than community-based
offenders and could also lead to changes in relationships between youth,
their peers, and the school adults with whom they interact on a more con-
sistent basis than police officers or crime victims (Anyon, 2016).
School and Student Participation in RIs

Schools often vary tremendously in their adoption of new initiatives (Forman, 2015). One measure of program diffusion is the degree to which an intervention is used by practitioners (Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Schulte, Easton, & Parker, 2009). Several studies have shown that schools’ use of restorative approaches to discipline can differ throughout a district, which may weaken their impact on student outcomes (Jain et al., 2014; McClusky et al., 2008). Lower use of RIs in response to discipline incidents can indicate practical barriers such as lack of training or staffing, poor alignment between a restorative philosophy and the norms or values of school personnel, and/or limited opportunities for practitioners to improve their skills (Anyon, 2016; Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Yet no studies have examined the relationship between school-level rates of RI use and individual student outcomes after receiving an RI.

Moreover, given consistent evidence that schools contribute to sorting and labeling students (Weinstein, 2002), a concern about the implementation of alternatives to suspension would be that participation in RIs would reflect typical dynamics related to power and privilege. This would parallel consistent patterns in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems whereby more disadvantaged youth and their families receive harsher consequences, and fewer support services, than their privileged counterparts (Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2008; Derezotes, Testa, & Poertner, 2005). In fact, using data from a national survey of principals in the late 1990s, Payne and Welch (2010) found that the proportion of Black students at the school level was negatively associated with the site’s reported use of restorative practices in response to student misbehavior. Thus, there is a need for new research using actual discipline records to assess whether students from disadvantaged groups similarly participate in RIs when they receive a discipline referral compared to more advantaged student groups. Equitable participation is especially needed for Black, Latino, Native American, and male students as well as students in special education—all groups of students who tend to receive suspension at higher rates than more advantaged peers (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

The Current Study

RIs in school settings appear to be a promising response to discipline problems. However, to date, few studies have analyzed RI implementation results using statistical approaches that account for the hierarchical nature of these datasets, in which students are nested within schools, or control for confounds like the type of student offense (Schiff, 2013). The current study controls for a range of covariates, most notably students’ socioeconomic status and their number/type of ODRs, to assess the relationship between participation in RIs and adverse student discipline outcomes during the spring semester. The study builds on prior analyses conducted in the
same school district (Anyon et al., 2014) by using time-ordered data from a subsequent school year linked to school-level rates of RI use. Specifically, current analyses examine whether receiving RIs in the first semester is associated with lower odds of disciplined students receiving additional ODRs or OSSs in the second semester. Scholars have argued that students from disenfranchised groups could benefit the most from RIs focused on building relationships, soliciting student voice, promoting an ethic of care, and reintegrating students back into the school community (Drewery, 2004). Therefore, an exploratory analysis also examines whether the association between RI participation and discipline is moderated by student racial background (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

The study also builds on prior findings indicating that the implementation of restorative programming varies widely across schools (Jain et al., 2014; McClusky et al., 2008). To this end, it examines whether school-level variation in RI use is associated with student-level discipline outcomes (Schulte et al., 2009). We postulate that the relationship between student participation in RIs and subsequent discipline outcomes will be stronger in schools that use RIs more often. Prior theory and research guides this hypothesis: Relative to schools relying more on exclusionary discipline and less on RIs, schools with higher rates of RI participation may reflect staff members’ commitment to, preparation for, and/or skill in implementing high-quality RIs (Cross et al., 2011; Forman, 2015). Through an equity lens, the study also considers whether marginalized and disadvantaged groups have similar patterns of participation in RIs. To our knowledge, no studies have compared the sociodemographic characteristics of students who have or have not participated in RIs.

In summary, the following questions guide this study: (1a) Is a student’s participation in one or more RIs in the first semester associated with lower odds of ODRs and/or OSSs in the second semester? (1b) Is the association between participation in RIs and later discipline incidents moderated by student racial background or school-level use of RI? (2) Do disciplined students from disadvantaged backgrounds have equitable participation in RIs?

Method

School District and Study Participants

Study Site

The study site for this investigation is Denver Public Schools (hereafter referred to as “the District”). The District is uniquely situated as a site to examine the influence of RIs on school discipline outcomes. First, following a major discipline policy reform in 2008 that aimed to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline sanctions, increase alternative approaches such as RIs, and eliminate racial disparities in suspension and expulsion, the
District has witnessed sustained reductions in rates of OSS, expulsion, and law enforcement referral (Anyon et al., 2014). These results are impressive because they have taken place during a time when the overall District population has increased by 14%, making the District among the fastest growing urban school districts in the nation (Department of Planning and Analysis, 2013). Second, despite these successes, District data indicate that reform goals have not yet been fully realized and that disparities in race, class, gender, and special education status persist in school discipline outcomes (Anyon et al., 2014). These trends prompted District leaders’ interest in evaluating the impact of RIs on ODRs and OSSs to assess whether additional resources should be invested in this approach.

In the 2012–2013 school year, the District served a student population (N = 90,546) that was 57.31% Latino, 20.83% White, 14.47% Black, 3.35% Asian, 2.99% Multiracial, 0.81% Native American, and 0.24% Pacific Islander. Forty-nine percent were female, and 51% were male. Close to half (44%) of District students were English Language Learners (ELLs). The District serves predominantly low-income students, as over two thirds of the students in the District were eligible for free and reduced lunch (68.8%) and 2.2% of students were identified as being homeless. In addition, 11.5% of District students participated in special education, and 1.1% were identified as having an emotional disability (ED).

School District Discipline Reform

After overhauling the District’s school discipline policy reform in 2008, school officials began offering voluntary staff training in restorative approaches. The training was, and continues to be, available to any employee of the District. Staff members can choose to sign up to participate via an online registration system where all professional development opportunities are listed. During monthly meetings with school-based staff, District leaders strongly recommended that principals, disciplinarians, teachers, and special service providers (such as social workers and psychologists) participate in the training. Two types of training are provided to staff. The first is an introductory training that is 4 hours long and focuses on preventive RIs (e.g., classroom community-building circles). Relevant to the current study, the second training is 2 days long and emphasizes RIs in response to discipline incidents. The following content is covered in the 2-day trainings: (a) overview of the origins and key principles of RIs (including their use in response to concerns about racial disparities in OSS), (b) review of empirical evidence of the effectiveness of restorative approaches in the District and beyond, (c) RIs as they relate to District discipline policy and schools’ student codes of conduct, (d) brief introduction to prevention-oriented restorative practices (dialogues and proactive circles), (e) lengthy introduction to intervention-oriented restorative practices (reactive circles, mediations, and conferences), (f) overview of core features of all restorative practices (e.g., problem
solving, paraphrasing, reframing), and (g) strategies to monitor the imple-
mentation and success of restorative approaches. Each content area is sup-
plemented with interactive role-play scenarios and case studies (DPS, 2012).

At the end of the training, participants are provided with a handbook 
that details all content from the training, including example codes of conduct 
and forms for implementing restorative approaches (e.g., agreements, action 
plans, parent letters, and evaluative surveys). On-site coaching and support 
from the district coordinator is available following the training. Since August 
2008, more than 2,700 district educators have participated in the 2-day train-
ing. In the 2012–2013 school year (the focus of the current study), 126 staff 
members (37 teachers, 28 administrators, and 61 support service providers) 
represented 53 District schools at the trainings.

District policy strongly recommends that students be offered a RI for 
behavior that leads to a discipline action. Restorative conferencing is an option 
for Type 2 (e.g., severe defiance of authority/disobedience) through Type 5 
(e.g., first degree assault) infractions (DPS, 2008). The policy suggests RIs 
may be provided independently (e.g., RI only), as alternatives to each other 
(e.g., RI or 1-day suspension), or in conjunction with each other (e.g., RI 
and in-school-suspension) (DPS, 2008). These decisions are made by school 
administrators and vary depending on their site’s specific code of conduct.
Therefore, it is not known if RIs were offered as options in a similar manner 
to students at all schools. This limitation is common in school discipline 
research because most discipline policies rely on the discretion of administra-
tors in determining consequences, which are often inconsistently imple-
mented (Hannon et al., 2013; Morris, 2005; Shaw & Braden, 1990).

If an administrator does decide to incorporate a RI as part of resolving 
a discipline incident, District protocol is that the student then meets with 
the trained staff member. If the student is willing to “take responsibility 
for his or her part of the situation” after reflecting on the incident, a restor-
ative circle, mediation, or conference with all affected parties is held (DPS, 
2012, p. 13). If not, the student is referred back to the school administrator 
for a different consequence. In the framework of a tiered system of support 
(RtI), circles, mediations, and conferences are considered targeted (Tier 2) 
and intensive (Tier 3) interventions, as opposed to Tier 1 universal supports 
(Berkowitz, 2012; Corrigan, 2012). Restorative conferences in the District 
typically involve those directly involved in the conflict (typically a two-party 
dispute). Reactive circles include individuals indirectly affected by an 
incident—an incident can indirectly affect others through disruptions to 
instruction or community well-being (González, 2015). At the end of a RI, 
participants develop an agreement or action plan for “making things right,” 
and all involved parties sign the agreement.
Student Sample

The student sample included all youth \( (n = 9,921) \) in Grades K–12 across all District schools \( (n = 180 \text{ schools}) \) who were issued one or more ODRs in the 2012–2013 school year (see Table 1). These disciplined students comprised 11% of all youth in the District. Mirroring trends observed by other researchers, disciplined students were disproportionately Black, Latino, Native American, male, low-income, eligible for special education, and classified as ED. Findings from chi-square tests shown in Table 1 indicate that subgroup differences in discipline rates were statistically significant. For example, Black students comprised 14.5% of the general student population versus 25.2% of the population with at least one ODR. Students who identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, White, or ELL were issued ODRs at significantly lower rates than their enrollment. Suspension rates had similar patterns of significant over- and underrepresentation of varying student groups. Table 1 also indicates that RIs were most often utilized with students who were referred to the office for midrange offenses such as disobedience or defiance and detrimental behavior.

Table 2 presents disproportionality figures for ODRs and OSSs for all racial groups in the District that parallel the patterns evident in Table 1. Risk indices capture rates of suspension and referrals for each subgroup. They were calculated by dividing the number of one group of students who have been referred or suspended by the number of that same group in the population of the district (Skiba et al., 2008). Relative risk ratios (RRRs) were calculated as the ratio of the risk indexes of two groups (IDEA Data Center, 2014; Shaw, Putnam-Hornstein, Magruder, & Needell, 2008). In other words, the RRR is a ratio of ODR or suspension rates per 1,000 between two groups of students (Shaw et al., 2008). For example, in the case of ODRs, Black students had a risk index of 19.02% and RRRs of 3.41 compared to White youth and 1.99 compared to all other students. Among Latinos, the ODR rate was 11.22%, and the RRRs were 2.00 compared to White students and 1.06 compared to all other students. For OSSs, Black students had a suspension rate of 9.64% and the RRRs were 4.95 compared to White students and 2.55 compared to all other students. In contrast, the suspension rate for Latino students was 4.46%, whereas the RRRs were 2.29 compared to White students and .92 compared to all other students.

Measures

Sociodemographic and discipline records were downloaded from the District’s electronic student information system (Infinite Campus). Downloaded datasets included school-level characteristics (e.g., enrollment size), student background information, and student-level discipline records.
Table 1
Sample Characteristics of Students Who Received One or More Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) Across One School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Students (N = 90,546)</th>
<th>Disciplined Studentsa,b (n = 9,921)</th>
<th>Received an OSSc (n = 4,184)</th>
<th>Participated in RI(^d) (n = 1,277)</th>
<th>Did Not Participate in RI(^c) (n = 8,644)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student sociodemographics (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American (n = 735)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.99*</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian (n = 3,036)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.5***</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (n = 13,098)</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>25.2***</td>
<td>30.2***</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino (n = 51,893)</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>58.7**</td>
<td>55.3***</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (n = 18,858)</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>10.6***</td>
<td>9.0***</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino (n = 216)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial (n = 2,710)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys (n = 46,255)</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>65.8***</td>
<td>66.9***</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free/reduced lunch (n = 62,321)</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>84.8***</td>
<td>87.6***</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELLs (n = 39,871)</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>37.8***</td>
<td>33.5***</td>
<td>34.0**</td>
<td>38.4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in special education (n = 10,422)</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>20.28***</td>
<td>25.7 ***</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED (n = 954)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.0***</td>
<td>7.2 ***</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (n = 35,916)</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>22.5***</td>
<td>15.9***</td>
<td>17.2***</td>
<td>23.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle (n = 12,924)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>28.2***</td>
<td>28.2***</td>
<td>32.0***</td>
<td>27.6***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (n = 19,034)</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>26.2***</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>20.2***</td>
<td>27.1***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative grade configuration (n = 22,632)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>23.1***</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>30.7***</td>
<td>22.0***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral reasonsc(^e),g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying (n = 823)</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.0***</td>
<td>7.9***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of school property (n = 200)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.1***</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedient/defiant (n = 3,212)</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>34.6***</td>
<td>37.7***</td>
<td>31.6***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other code of conduct violation (n = 2,474)</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>26.5 **</td>
<td>32.6***</td>
<td>23.8***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detrimental behavior (n = 5,415)</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>63.0***</td>
<td>69.0***</td>
<td>52.5***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Students (N = 90,546)</th>
<th>Disciplined Students¹,² (n = 9,921)</th>
<th>Received an OSS³ (n = 4,184)</th>
<th>Participated in RI⁴ (n = 1,277)</th>
<th>Did Not Participate in RI⁵ (n = 8,644)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third degree assault (n = 247)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.4***</td>
<td>3.8**</td>
<td>2.3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful sexual behavior (n = 23)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug possession or distribution (n = 730)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>13.2***</td>
<td>4.5***</td>
<td>7.8***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous weapon (n = 173)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.3***</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of discipline consequences⁶

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>M (SD)⁷</th>
<th>M (SD)⁸</th>
<th>M (SD)⁹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>.68 (1.12)</td>
<td>1.60 (1.25)⁸</td>
<td>.79 (1.31)**</td>
<td>.66 (1.10)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-school suspension</td>
<td>.61 (1.18)</td>
<td>.69 (1.45)***</td>
<td>.79 (1.41)***</td>
<td>.59 (1.14)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior contract</td>
<td>.03 (.20)</td>
<td>.07 (.30)***</td>
<td>.08 (.33)***</td>
<td>.02 (.18)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI</td>
<td>.17 (.52)</td>
<td>.18 (.56)</td>
<td>1.30 (.79)⁸</td>
<td>0 (0)⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred to law enforcement</td>
<td>.08 (.32)</td>
<td>.17 (.00)***</td>
<td>.11 (.01)***</td>
<td>.08 (.00)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>.01 (.09)</td>
<td>.02 (.00)***</td>
<td>.02 (.00)***</td>
<td>.01 (.00)***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ED = emotional disability; ELL = English Language Learners; ODR = office discipline referrals; OSS = out-of-school suspension; RI = restorative interventions.

¹Disciplined students received one or more ODRs during the 2012–2013 school year.
²Significant differences were determined by chi-square tests, compared with all students in the District who did not receive one or more office referrals.
³Significant differences were determined by chi-square tests, compared with all disciplined students not suspended.
⁴Significant differences were determined by chi-square tests, compared with all disciplined students who did not receive a RI.
⁵Significant differences were determined by chi-square tests, compared with all disciplined students who did receive a RI.
⁶Percentages of referral reasons do not add up to 100 because 42% of students received more than one ODR over the course of a school year.
⁷Due to space limitations, only the nine most common reasons for referral are presented in the table. The complete data for all referral reasons are available upon request from the authors.
⁸Significant differences were determined by independent-samples t tests, comparing students who did not receive an OSS to those who did.
⁹Significant differences were determined by independent-samples t tests, comparing students who did not receive a RI to those who did.

¹Discipline consequences are not mutually exclusive. For one discipline incident, a student may receive multiple consequences as part of the resolution to his or her offense. Forty-eight percent of students also have more than one discipline incident, so they also can receive a consequence more than once.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
The District’s discipline database included information for each ODR issued to a student in 2012–2013; this information included the reason for each referral and related consequences. These data are entered by a school staff member trained to indicate the reason for the referral based on the categories in the District’s discipline policy (DPS, 2008). ODRs reflect a multistep process whereby educators assess student misconduct, complete the formal discipline referral paperwork, and record it in the school’s database. Despite educators’ varying approaches to addressing student behavior or misconduct, and their inconsistent use of the legally mandated discipline record keeping, research has established that ODRs are consistent correlates of teachers’ perceptions of problematic behavior, poor teacher–student relationships, future misconduct, and future academic difficulties (e.g., Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011). For example, students’ receipt of one or more ODRs is associated with negative teacher behavioral ratings (Pas et al., 2011) and, years later, with being off-track for graduation (Tobin & Sugai, 1999)—evidence for the concurrent and predictive validity of ODRs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Race</th>
<th>Risk Index</th>
<th>RRR Compared to White Students</th>
<th>RRR Compared to All Other Students</th>
<th>Risk Index</th>
<th>RRR Compared to White Students</th>
<th>RRR Compared to All Other Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19.08%</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>11.22%</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>4.46%</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.74%</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>1.81%</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>5.85%</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6.48%</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>2.31%</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. RRR = relative risk ratio.

aThe risk index is the proportion of students from one racial group who have been suspended. It is computed by dividing the number of students suspended from one group by the total number of students from that group (Skiba et al., 2008).
bThe relative risk ratio is computed by taking a ratio of the rates per 1,000 between two groups (IDEA Data Center, 2014; Shaw et al., 2008).
The ODR referral categories represent the total number of times a student was referred to the office for each particular ODR reason (0 = student was not referred to the office for this reason, 1 or more = number of referrals a student received for this behavior). This coding method was necessary because almost half of disciplined students (42%) were referred to the office more than once during the school year, often for different behaviors. Therefore, ODR reasons at the student level are not mutually exclusive; as a result, the reference group for each referral category is all other reasons. The nine most common reasons for an ODR (comprising 98% of all discipline incidents) were detrimental behavior (54.58% of disciplined students), disobedience or defiance (32.38%), other violations of the school’s code of conduct (24.94%), bullying (8.30%), possession and/or distribution of drugs (7.36%), third degree assault (2.49%), destruction of school property (2.02%), unlawful sexual behavior (1.38%), and weapons possession (1.74%). An additional seven reasons for referral were included in the dataset but were infrequently issued (e.g., alcohol violation [.97%], robbery [0.60%], tobacco violation [0.50%], gang affiliation [0.32%], first degree assault [.23%], witness intimidation [0.14%], other felonies [0.14%]) (see Table 1).

For each student ODR, the District’s discipline database indicated the type of consequences assigned by the administrator (one discipline incident may have multiple consequences). As shown in Table 1, among all disciplined students (defined as students who experienced an ODR at least once during the academic year), 13% received RIs and 43% received OSSs. In the current study, we distinguished between consequences received in the first or second semester. To answer Research Question 1, we created a dichotomous dependent variable to indicate whether, in the second semester, a student received one or more ODRs (1) or none at all (0). We also indicated whether a student in the second semester received an OSS (1) or not (0)—a group that included those students who never received another ODR. All analyses conducted to answer Research Question 1 included an independent variable that accounted for the total number of RIs a student received in the first semester (among those who participated in an RI; $M = 1.30$, $SD = .79$, minimum = 0; maximum = 8). To answer Research Question 2 regarding the equitable access to RIs, we created a dichotomous dependent variable to indicate whether, in the first semester as a consequence for an ODR, a student received one or more RIs (1) or no RIs (0). RIs included circles, mediations, and conferences; the dataset did not distinguish between these three practices.

**Student Characteristics**

The District’s electronic student information system included sociodemographic information for each student issued a discipline referral in 2012–2013. Student racial categories used by the District are as follows: (1) Native American or Alaska Native, (2) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific
Anyon et al.

Islander, (3) Asian or Asian American, (4) Black or African American (non-Hispanic), (5) Hispanic or Latino/Latina, (6) White or Caucasian, and (7) Multiracial. Each racial category was recoded into dummy variables with White students as the reference group. Additional student-level variables available in the dataset were all dichotomous and included gender (male or not), free and reduced lunch eligibility (eligible or not), special education status (active Individualized Education Program or not), designation as seriously emotionally disabled (ED or not), and ELL or not.

School Characteristics

School-level covariates were selected based on prior research consistently linking them to discipline outcomes (e.g., Arcia, 2007; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014), including proportion of the student body that was Black and the proportion eligible for free and reduced lunch, along with grade configuration and school size (divided by 100). Grade configuration was dummy coded with K–5 elementary schools as the reference group relative to middle schools, high schools, and schools with alternative combinations of grade levels (e.g., grades K–8). We also calculated school-wide use of RI by dividing the number of students who received RIs in each school by the number of students with ODRs from that site. The resulting RI rate ranged across schools from 0% to 75% (\(M = 8.31\%, SD = 13.10\%\)).

Data Analytic Plan

Multilevel logistic regression methods were used to assess study outcomes.1 Using STATA 13 software, hierarchical modeling techniques accounted for the nested structure of the dataset (Level 1 = students; Level 2 = schools) and were used to estimate the relationships between (a) student sociodemographic characteristics, (b) participation in RIs during the first semester of the school year, and (c) discipline outcomes in the second semester (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2008; Steenbergen & Jones, 2002). For research Questions 1a–c, we ran a set of models predicting the dependent variables (one or more second-semester ODRs and OSSs). The first models examined the overall association between student participation in RIs and subsequent discipline outcomes. The second models included interaction terms testing whether the correlation between participation in RIs and subsequent discipline outcomes varied by student race or by school-level rates of RI use. For Research Question 2, we ran a single model with sociodemographic characteristics predicting participation in one or more RIs.

In all analyses, we covaried number of referrals for each discipline category, as the District requires schools to implement a graduated discipline system in which consequences increase with the seriousness and number of student offenses. This practice is consistent with empirical evidence from other school districts indicating that ODR reason is related to the
severity of consequence (Skiba et al., 2014). All possible reasons for referral were included as covariates in analyses, but regression estimates were only tabled for the nine most common reasons due to space constraints. The complete data and model output for all referral reasons are available upon request. To improve the precision of our estimates, we also covaried student characteristics (e.g., free and reduced lunch eligibility) and school characteristics (i.e., school size, proportion Black student enrollment).

Results

While reviewing the results below, the reader must keep in mind that this correlational study examines the association between RIs and students’ future discipline outcomes, without accounting for all relevant confounds. Therefore, findings do not indicate causality or provide strong evidence of intervention efficacy or effectiveness. Moreover, because the study dataset does not include implementation process data, the circumstances under which certain groups came to participate in RIs more or less than others are not known. Results should therefore be interpreted to add depth to prior findings from descriptive, qualitative, and single case research on RIs and identify patterns and relationships that provide direction for future studies.

RIs and Second-Semester ODRs and OSSs

Tables 3 and 4 show the results of a multilevel logistic regression model predicting the odds of receiving at least one ODR or OSS in the second semester of the same year for students who participated in RIs during the first semester. The odds ratio (OR) for each predictor and the 95% confidence intervals for each OR represent the association of an individual predictor (e.g., number of RIs received) with the dependent variable (e.g., ODR), accounting for all other covariates. An OR larger (or smaller) than 1.00 indicates an increase (or decrease) in the odds of an RI participant receiving future discipline, compared to his or her referred peers who did not receive a RI. Findings reveal that, after accounting for students’ reasons for and frequency of ODRs and a range of school and student characteristics, students who received RIs as consequences for referrals in the first semester had lower odds than their peers of being referred back to the office for misconduct in the second semester (OR = .21, \( p < .001 \); Model 1, Table 3); these students were also less likely to receive an OSS (OR = .07, \( p < .001 \); Model 3, Table 4) in the second semester.

The next statistical models included interaction terms to determine if the strength of this correlation varied by student or school characteristics. The results indicate that results were equivalent across racial groups for second-semester ODRs (Table 3, Model 2) and OSSs (Table 4, Model 4). Specifically, the interaction terms (e.g., Black × Participation in RIs) testing
Table 3
Multilevel Logistic Regression Model of the Relationship Between Participation in RIs and Second-Semester Office Disciplinary Referrals (n = 9,921)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-semester RI</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>.09, .51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student sociodemographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (comparison group = White youth)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>.79, 1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.90, 1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.73, 2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>.61, 1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>.64, 1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.58, 12.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>.86, 1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>.84, 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.97, 1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>.81, 1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
<td>.53, .95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral reasona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>2.12***</td>
<td>1.76, 2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of school property</td>
<td>1.81**</td>
<td>1.25, 2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedient/defiant</td>
<td>2.10***</td>
<td>1.93, 2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other code of conduct violation</td>
<td>1.97***</td>
<td>1.77, 2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detrimental behavior</td>
<td>1.89***</td>
<td>1.75, 2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third degree assault</td>
<td>2.55***</td>
<td>1.84, 3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful sexual behavior</td>
<td>1.68*</td>
<td>1.10, 2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug possession or distribution</td>
<td>1.67***</td>
<td>1.40, 1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous weapon</td>
<td>2.07***</td>
<td>1.37, 3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black students</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>.16, 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% eligible free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.89, 3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools (Grades 9–12)</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>.29, .64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle schools (Grades 6–8)</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>.60, 1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other grade configurations</td>
<td>0.68**</td>
<td>.49, .95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>1.07**</td>
<td>1.03, 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of RI use</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.40, 2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American × Participation in RI</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black × Participation in RI</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino × Participation in RI</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
whether student race moderated the link between participation in RIs and second-semester discipline outcomes were all nonsignificant.

Interaction terms were also included to examine whether the negative association between participation in RIs and adverse discipline outcomes was moderated by school-wide RI use (Participation in RI × School RI Rate). As shown in Table 3, Model 2 indicates that RI participants had lower odds of receiving a second-semester ODR in schools that had higher school-wide RI rates (OR = .86, p < .001). These results suggest that school-level use of RI relates to the probability of a student receiving an ODR after participating in the intervention. Holding all other variables in the model constant, a referred student who did not participate in an RI during the first semester and attended a school with an average first-semester RI rate (M = 8.31%) had a 72% probability of receiving one or more ODRs in the second semester (Huang, 2014; Huang, Invernizzi, & Drake, 2012). A referred student who did participate in at least one RI in the first semester and attended a school with an average first-semester RI rate had a much lower (28%) probability of receiving one or more ODRs in the second semester. A referred student who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian × Participation in RI</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial × Participation in RI</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander × Participation in RI</td>
<td>— b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School RI Rate Participation in RI</td>
<td>.86***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>Log likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.75***</td>
<td>-5,148.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.64</td>
<td>-97, -.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.10, .18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval; ED = emotional disability; ELL = English Language Learners; ICC = intraclass correlation; OR = odds ratio; RI = restorative interventions.

a Additional low-frequency reasons for referral were included in the statistical model, but estimates are not presented in the table. The complete output for all models is available upon request from the authors.

b No Pacific Islander students received a RI in the first semester.

c Log of the school-level random effect variance component.

d Residual intraclass correlation, or the total variance contributed by the school-level random effect variance component.

*p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
### Table 4
Multilevel Logistic Regression Model of the Relationship Between Participation in RIs and Second-Semester Out-of-School Suspension (n = 9,921)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-semester RI</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
<td>.01, .31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student sociodemographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (comparison group = White youth)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.95, 1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.33**</td>
<td>1.08, 1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.89, 2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.81, 2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.92, 1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.30, 4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>.87, 1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>1.28**</td>
<td>1.08, 1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>.80, 1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>1.16*</td>
<td>1.00, 1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>1.39**</td>
<td>1.06, 1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral reason**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>1.45***</td>
<td>1.24, 1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of school property</td>
<td>2.08***</td>
<td>1.50, 2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedient/defiant</td>
<td>1.29***</td>
<td>1.23, 1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other code of conduct violation</td>
<td>1.47***</td>
<td>1.35, 1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detrimental behavior</td>
<td>1.62***</td>
<td>1.54, 1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-degree assault</td>
<td>3.05***</td>
<td>2.29, 4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful sexual behavior</td>
<td>1.86**</td>
<td>1.26, 2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug possession or distribution</td>
<td>3.26***</td>
<td>2.75, 3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous weapon</td>
<td>4.75***</td>
<td>3.32, 6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black students</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.51, 8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% eligible free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>4.12**</td>
<td>1.61, 10.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools (Grades 9–12)</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>.43, 1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle schools (Grades 6–8)</td>
<td>1.86*</td>
<td>1.05, 3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other grade configurations</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.91, 2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>1.08*</td>
<td>1.01, 1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of RI use</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.03, .53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American ×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black × Participation in RI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino × Participation in RI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
participated in at least one RI but attended a school with a school-wide RI rate that was 1 \textit{SD} above the mean (\textit{SD} = 13.10\%) had an even lower (18\%) probability of receiving one or more ODRs in the second semester. In contrast, moderation by school-level rate of RI use was not statistically significant when predicting second-semester OSSs (Table 4, Model 4, Participation in RI \times School RI Rate = \textit{ns}). That said, the school-level RI rate was negatively correlated with receiving OSSs for all students (OR = .13, \textit{p} < .01).

The models also revealed that even after accounting for RI participation at the student and school level, Black students and those eligible for free lunch, classified as having an ED, or receiving special education services still had higher odds of receiving second-semester OSSs relative to their peers (ORs ranged from 1.16 to 1.37, \textit{p} < .05). This finding held no matter the seriousness and frequency of ODRs or the type of school setting (e.g., grade level, school size), indicating that despite RI participation, disparities in exclusionary discipline remained for Black students, low-income students, and students in special education.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Table 4 (continued)}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
 & Model 3 & Model 4 \\
\hline
Asian \times Participation in RI & 1.23 & .13, 11.86 \\
Multiracial \times Participation in RI & .39 & .09, 1.76 \\
Pacific Islander \times Participation in RI & \ldots & \ldots \\
Participation in RI \times School RI Rate & .98 & .91, 1.05 \\
\hline
Variance component$^{c}$ & .33 & .05, .60 \\
\text{ICC}$^{d}$ & .30 & .24, .36 \\
Log likelihood & $-4,698.72$ & $-4,695.00$ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{Note}. CI = confidence interval; ED = emotional disability; ELL = English Language Learners; ICC = intraclass correlation; OR = Odds ratio; RI = restorative interventions.

$^{a}$Additional low-frequency reasons for referral were included in the statistical model, but estimates are not presented in the table. The complete output for all models is available upon request from the authors.

$^{b}$No Pacific Islander students received a RI in the first semester.

$^{c}$Log of the school-level random effect variance component.

$^{d}$Residual intraclass correlation or the total variance contributed by the school-level random effect variance component.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
Table 5 presents the results of the multilevel logistic regression model predicting student participation in at least one RI. Results indicate that, accounting for students’ number of ODRs in each referral category and school-level covariates, only one student group of interest—youth designated as ELL—had lower odds of participating in an RI (OR = .81, p < .05) compared to non-ELL students. On the other hand, many student groups that tend to be overrepresented in exclusionary discipline outcomes were equally likely to participate in a RI as their peers. Specifically, Native American students, males, low-income students, students in special education, and students classified as having an ED had similar odds of participating in a RI as other, more advantaged groups of students. Results also indicate that two marginalized and disadvantaged groups were more likely to participate in RIs. Of interest was that Latino (OR = 1.40, p < .05) and Black (OR = 1.36, p < .05) students had higher odds of participating in a RI relative to White students.

As shown in Table 5, findings from the statistical models also reveal important information about the type of offenses that are associated with RI participation. For example, students who were referred for a greater number of offenses involving interpersonal conflict had the highest odds of participating in RIs; these offenses included bullying, detrimental behavior, and third-degree assault (ORs ranged from 1.35–2.14, p < .01). In contrast, students referred for drug possession or distribution were less likely than other students to engage in a RI (OR = .72, p < .05). Other referral reasons, such as destruction of school property, disobedience or defiance, and weapons possession, were not statistically significant predictors of participation in RIs. Also noteworthy was the finding indicating that students in schools with alternative grade configurations (relative to elementary schools) had over three times higher odds of participating in RIs (OR = 3.50, p < .05).

Discussion

The study suggests that RIs may be a useful alternative to punitive, exclusionary consequences. Findings corroborate prior research (Anyon et al., 2014) and address methodological limitations by (a) controlling for a range of student and school characteristics using a multilevel modeling approach and (b) using time-ordered discipline records of individual students across a school year. Specifically, with each RI students received (circles, mediations, or conferences) during the first semester, their odds of receiving another ODR or OSS in the second semester were lower. This association held after accounting for sociodemographics (e.g., race, gender, free/reduced lunch eligibility), educational placements (e.g., general or special education), frequency or seriousness of office referrals (e.g., detrimental behavior, third-degree assault,
Table 5

Multilevel Logistic Regression Model Predicting Participation in a Restorative Intervention (n = 9,921)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student sociodemographics</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race (comparison group = White students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>1.40*</td>
<td>1.07, 1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.36*</td>
<td>1.02, 1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>.40, 1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.65, 2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>.53, 1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.29, 7.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.89, 1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduce price lunch</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.83, 1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELLs</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td>.69, .97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>.76, 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>.54, 1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral reasona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>1.35**</td>
<td>1.11, 1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of school property</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.65, 1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedient/defiant</td>
<td>1.04*</td>
<td>.99, 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other code of conduct violation</td>
<td>1.31**</td>
<td>1.19, 1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detrimental behavior</td>
<td>1.37**</td>
<td>1.30, 1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-degree assault</td>
<td>2.14**</td>
<td>1.47, 3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful sexual behavior</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.58, 1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug possession or distribution</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
<td>.55, .93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous weapon</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.76, 2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black students</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>.01, 2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% eligible for free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.18, 8.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.60, 8.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>3.29*</td>
<td>.94, 11.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative grade configuration</td>
<td>3.50**</td>
<td>1.21, 10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.95, 1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance componentb</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.143, 2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICCc</td>
<td>.65***</td>
<td>.56, .72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval; ED = emotional disability; ELL = English Language Learners; ICC = intraclass correlation; OR = odds ratio.

Additional low-frequency reasons for referral were included in the statistical model, but estimates are not presented in the table. The complete output for all models is available upon request from the authors.

Log of the school-level random effect variance component.

Residual intraclass correlation or the total variance contributed by the school-level random effect variance component.

\( p < .10 \), \( * p < .05 \), \( ** p < .01 \), \( *** p < .001 \).
dangerous weapon possession), and diverse school environments in terms of grade level (e.g., elementary school, high school), size of the student body, proportion of Black and low-income students, and school-level RI rate. The study also found that the negative association between participation in RIs and adverse discipline outcomes was similar across racial groups; in other words, student race did not have a moderating role.

Our ability to interpret these results or make claims about the impact of RIs on discipline outcomes is highly constrained by lack of random assignment (by school or student) to RIs and the limited covariates in our dataset. The associations between receipt of RIs in the first semester and fewer ODRs/OSSs in the second semester did not account for a range of student and school characteristics that could influence RI participation and/or subsequent discipline incidents. For example, there is emerging evidence that students’ likelihood of participating in a restorative conference is influenced by their trust or relationship with the person who will be implementing the intervention (Anyon, 2016). Other influences could include students’ propensity to take responsibility for their actions, a disciplinarian’s willingness to offer students the opportunity to participate in a RI, or a school leader’s commitment to proactive or preventative approaches to addressing misbehavior (e.g., Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). Since we were not able to account for these confounding factors, study results cannot be interpreted to mean that first-semester RI participation caused a reduction in second-semester ODRs and OSSs. Nevertheless, the finding of a negative association between these two variables is promising and warrants further investigation.

Variability in School Use of RIs

The study demonstrated that schools varied considerably in the rates at which referred students in the school participated in circles, mediations, and conferences. For example, the full range of school-wide RI rates was 0% to 75% ($M = 8.3\%, \ SD = .13$), with 13% of all disciplined students in the district having participated in at least one RI. Referred students in schools with higher rates of RI use, in general, had lower odds of receiving an OSS than students in schools with lower RI rates. In the case of office referrals, school-wide RI rate also moderated the relationship between individual RI participation and subsequent ODRs. This might suggest that schools implementing circles, mediations, and conferences are generally seeking to steer students out of the discipline system and limit the use of suspension when they do. Many schools in this district are engaging in a broad set of prevention and intervention initiatives to keep students in the classroom and the school building (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016). This in and of itself is a worthy goal given that negative academic and behavioral trajectories of referred students are exacerbated when they are excluded from instruction (e.g., Balfanz et al., 2015).
Also noteworthy was that results at the student level held no matter the school’s overall rate of RI use. Whether or not schools regularly or rarely engaged students in circles, mediations, or conferences, the negative correlation between RI participation in the first semester and exclusionary practices (ODRs and OSSs) in the second semester remained. Finally, the study found school-level use of RIs moderated the relationship between student-level participation in RIs and another discipline incident in the second semester. In other words, high program use at the school level (a facet of treatment delivery; Schulte et al., 2009) strengthened the negative relationship between RI participation and subsequent office referrals at the student level. This suggests that school-level participation rates relate to the probability of a student experiencing an office disciplinary referral after participating in the intervention. These findings are consistent with arguments some RI scholars and practitioners have made that the depth of school community engagement with these practices is critical to maximizing their benefits (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016). Indeed, as innovations spread and take hold through a school building, educators’ attitudes, beliefs, and skills related to the new programming may actually strengthen the quality of implementation and resulting effects on student outcomes (Rogers, 2003).

On the other hand, it is also plausible that school capacity to implement RIs meaningfully operates as a crucial driver of disciplinary outcomes.

**RIs and Equity Issues**

Results of this study demonstrate that in a large urban district many disadvantaged youth had similar rates of RI participation as more privileged students, with the noteworthy exception of ELL students. Relative to their peers, low-income students, Native American youth, males, and students with special education services or an ED classification participated comparably in RIs. Black and Latino students were more likely to participate in RIs than White students. Moreover, the only school-level predictor of student-level RI participation was the grade configuration of the school; students at sites with non-traditional formats (e.g., K–12, K–8) had significantly higher odds of participating in this alternative to suspension. These findings are surprising in light of experimental studies indicating that disadvantaged groups may consciously (or unconsciously) be issued harsher sanctions for similar behavior than more advantaged groups (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). More specifically, results stand in contrast to previous research by Payne and Welch (2010) indicating that, at the school level, the proportion of Black students was a negative predictor of a school’s use of student conferences, peer mediations, restitution, and community service in response to discipline incidents. It is possible that the unique dynamics of service access in this study reflect the District’s focus on eliminating racial disparities in school discipline, as articulated by board policy, professional development
trainings on RIs, and district officials’ public statements (DPS, 2008, 2012). However, it is concerning that ELLs were less likely to participate in RIs. This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating that students’ access to school-based programs can be limited for students for whom English is not their native language (Anyon et al., 2013). Taken together, findings suggest that educators need to be vigilant in ensuring fair access to less punitive alternatives when implementing new discipline initiatives, such as RIs. In other words, the recent push for schools to disaggregate their ODR and suspension data should be extended to the use of RIs.

Despite a higher likelihood of participation in RIs relative to White students, Black students remained at heightened risk of being suspended in the second semester. Likewise, despite having comparable participation in RIs, low-income students, youth in special education, and those with an ED classification also had higher odds of being issued a second-semester suspension than their more advantaged peers. Comparable participation in RIs for these groups did not correspond with eliminating heightened risk among these populations for a future second-semester OSS across the district—a risk that persisted even after controlling for participation in RIs and frequency and seriousness of referral reasons. In other words, discipline disparities were not eliminated in the District despite its use of restorative alternatives to suspension. It therefore seems likely that additional forms of prevention and intervention, in addition to individual RIs, are needed to fully address equity concerns (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016).

The persistence of disparities may be due to a number of reasons. RIs were issued as consequences for a wide range of referral reasons including detrimental behavior, bullying, and third-degree assault. That said, only 12.52% of all those referred for discipline in the first semester in the District (\( n = 652 \)) received a RI. Implementation may need to be much more widespread and frequent to significantly reduce or eliminate disparities in discipline. The infrequent use of RIs in many schools reflects the challenge of integrating alternative disciplinary strategies in large urban school districts. Although the District offers voluntary training about RIs, additional resources like school-based RI coordinators may be necessary to increase implementation and reduce racial discipline gaps district-wide (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016; Durlak & Dupre, 2008).

Schools may make additional gains in reducing discipline disparities by increasing their prevention efforts (while maintaining the focus on restorative approaches to intervention; Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016). Building community, creating positive social bonds, and fostering investment in school rules before conflict arises may be among the keys to reducing disparities, especially for students in groups who are alienated from school (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2016). Moreover, preventive interventions can also occur by training teachers to strengthen the motivating and engaging qualities of instruction and by preventing negative teacher–student interactions from...
occurring in the first place (Gregory, Hafen et al., 2016). Finally, staff training about culturally responsive practices and racial justice may reduce the likelihood of misreading or mislabeling students’ body language or speech and may decrease overly punitive responses to students of color (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016; Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015; Monroe, 2005).

Study Limitations and Implication for Future Research

Several limitations related to study design suggest that caution in interpreting study findings is warranted. First and foremost, we must reiterate that neither disciplined students nor school sites were randomly assigned to participate in RIs. Instead, the District policy recommends that RIs be used in response to midrange offenses when a student is willing to accept some responsibility for his or her actions. This potential of individual and school sorting of students toward or away from a RI suggests multiple potential sources of selection bias. For example, at the student level, those who were able to acknowledge their role in an offense may have already been less likely to reenter the discipline system. In other words, a student’s lack of ability to acknowledge his or her contributing role in a discipline incident is likely a risk for future discipline contacts but was not measured in this study. Moreover, the study was not able to directly measure and account for a school’s or administrator’s propensity to offer students RIs or punitive consequences in response to a discipline incident.

Whereas the current study found a significant association between RI participation and positive discipline outcomes, a crucial goal for future research is to move beyond a conditional analysis such as this to begin to identify design or analytic strategies to mitigate the influence of key selection processes. We anticipate that there may be barriers in implementing experimental designs to estimate the effects of RI (e.g., ethical considerations in differentially offering less exclusionary disciplinary options to students, given evidence of the harm of OSSs). If researchers must rely on observational designs, crucial first steps include more specific identification of (1) the RI intervention (e.g., what are the essential components of the intervention at school and student levels and at what intensity); (2) the student, educator, and school characteristics that are predictive of RI participation beyond basic sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., student verbal communication, emotional regulation, externalizing behaviors, history of disciplinary interactions, prior relationships with school staff, peer norms about the acceptability of RI, and a school or district’s willingness to implement RIs); and (3) how such characteristics contribute to exclusionary discipline outcomes of interest (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014). If such factors can be observed and measured reliably, propensity score matching methods may be a viable option for understanding the impact of RIs (see Hong & Raudenbush, 2005, as an exemplar).
The low incidence of RI use among disciplined students also raises questions about the capacity for widespread dissemination of this approach in school settings. When the district policy was passed in 2008, only 4% of all disciplined students participated in RIs. Four years later, the incidence of RI use increased to 12.52%, as reported in this study. Although this rate is low, it is important to note that district policy mandates were not accompanied with financial incentives or new site staff. The increased use of RIs is more impressive in this context, in which the only implementation supports offered to schools have been voluntary training and technical assistance led by one district coordinator. Future research should consider whether the diffusion of RIs in schools could be more widespread, with attention to other factors that affect the implementation of interventions like work climate, staff norms, the support of organizational leaders, and the development of “program champions” (Durlak & Dupre, 2008).

Another study limitation is that our dataset provided no information to assess the process or quality of RI implementation. Schools did not track whether, for example, disciplinarians adhered to eligibility protocols when offering RIs to students with discipline incidents or if participants were motivated by threats for more severe repercussions if they did not engage in an RI. Moreover, the dataset did not indicate to what degree each school experienced pressure to implement this approach or the degree to which educators felt motivated or skilled to do so.

Future research would be substantially strengthened by the inclusion of indicators that measure multiple and multilevel (student/school) factors related to implementation fidelity. Of particular relevance to school-based RIs are compatibility or fit between school leaders’ discipline philosophies and the principles that guide RIs, the degree to which school staff buy in to the approach, staff capacity (in particular the presence or absence of a person trained and available to facilitate formal mediations or conferences), and school personnel’s participation in RI trainings (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016; Payne & Welch, 2010). Such process and quality characteristics and the development of measures thereof have great potential to enhance both observational and experimental designs.

To further elucidate the finding of moderation by school-level rate of RIs, future research might compare schools with high versus low rates to ascertain if high participation schools have (1) better skilled facilitators of circles, mediations, and conferences due to practice; (2) positive peer norms related to RIs that influence individual students’ commitment to the restorative process; and/or (3) positive staff attitudes and expectancies related to RIs that impact their commitment to providing behavioral supports and following through with RI participants. These studies should also explore in a more multifaceted way the quality, quantity, and the degree to which RI needs to be implemented school wide in order to be maximally effective. More broadly, study findings highlight the need to account for school-level contextual factors in future studies of RIs.
Similarly, there are potentially multiple decision-making points that could result in the finding of varying RI participation rates across diverse student groups. School staff may tend to refer to RIs students who are from certain racial groups more than from other racial groups. Once referred and oriented to the restorative process, students from certain groups may tend to consent to participate more than their peers from other groups. Given this complexity, the current study’s focus on participation in RIs is only a first step in understanding disparate or comparable patterns of use of a promising alternative to suspension. Future research might seek to explain why Black and Latino students were more likely to participate in RIs than White students in this study. Qualitative research from schools with low and equitable suspension rates in Denver indicates that many school staff members are aware of racial disparities in school discipline and are actively encouraging the use of less punitive practices among students of color (Anyon, 2016; Anyon et. al., 2016), but these findings are not generalizable and further study is warranted. Studies might also seek to explain our finding that ELL students’ RI participation was low relative to non-ELL students. Such research might examine whether schools inadvertently deny access to RIs for students whose first language is not English because of cultural barriers or limited language capacity on the part of school staff.

The study’s singular focus on discipline outcomes also limits the scope of the findings. ODRs and OSSs reflect school staff’s use of formal discipline procedures and paperwork or data entry. The degree to which an ODR or OSS reflects student misconduct, staff’s tendency to use the formal discipline procedures, or poor classroom management skills is unknown (Morrison, Redding, Fisher, & Peterson, 2006). Future studies should include other school outcomes such as academic engagement, attendance, and achievement. This much-needed research would build on findings from Oakland where schools implementing RI, along with a range of other interventions, had significantly greater improvements in reading proficiency and greater reductions in absenteeism and dropout than non-RI schools (Jain et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

Study findings advance current knowledge about patterns and correlates of student participation in school-based RIs. Using discipline records from a large urban district, results indicate that students who received a RI in the first semester had lower odds of receiving another ODR or suspension in the second semester of the same school year. This finding held after accounting for student racial background, special education status, free or reduced lunch eligibility, and frequency and seriousness of disciplinary referrals. The study also showed that school-wide RI rates were negatively associated with exclusionary discipline outcomes. In fact, for ODRs, the strength of association between RI participation and adverse discipline
outcomes was more pronounced in schools with high rates of RI use. Finally, participation in RIs was comparable across many disadvantaged groups, with the notable exception of ELL students. However, Latino and Black students, two groups with disproportionally high rates of suspension in many regions in the United States, had greater odds of receiving RIs than their White peers. This suggests that for most disadvantaged groups in the District, schools implemented RIs in a manner that provided them equal access to an alternative, problem-solving approach to conflict. These findings are encouraging but do not provide causal evidence of the utility of this approach to reducing students’ risk of exclusionary discipline infractions. Experimental research with robust implementation process measures is sorely needed to identify the mechanisms underlying the patterns identified in this study.

Note

1We considered implementing a propensity score matching strategy guided by the methods of Hong and Raudenbush’s (2005) multilevel study of the effects of grade retention practices in schools. We ultimately ruled out such an approach for two reasons. First, we could not be completely certain, given the structure of the dataset, that key student-level predictors (ODRs) actually preceded receipt of RI, which is a fundamental condition for propensity score matching in intervention studies. Thus, the only available student matching variables were sociodemographic characteristics, which are unlikely to generate less biased results (Cook, Shadish, & Wong, 2008). As a comparison, Hong and Raudenbush’s (2005) multilevel propensity methods benefited from an extensive body of prior research on the student- and school-level attributes that predict grade retention. Moreover, their rich dataset had over 200 multilevel covariates to use in generating propensity scores. There is no comparable prior research on correlates of RI participation, and the dataset employed in this study only included a limited number of control variables.

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Manuscript received November 23, 2014
Final revision received September 25, 2016
Accepted September 26, 2016
“It’s all about the relationships”: Educators’ rationales and strategies for building connections with students in order to prevent exclusionary school discipline outcomes

Paper to be published in a 2018 issue of *Children and Schools*.

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Abstract

This qualitative study identified non-punitive and non-exclusionary discipline strategies used in schools with low out-of-school suspension rates. Interviews and focus groups with 198 educators from 33 low-suspending schools in a large urban district were conducted to learn more about the approaches that were essential to their school’s success. Data was analyzed using inductive and deductive approaches to identify themes regarding efficacious approaches across schools. Relationship building was noted as a key strategy in reducing exclusionary discipline outcomes and racial disparities in out-of-school suspension. Specific relationship building strategies and the rationale behind these practices are described, including home visits, greetings, morning meetings, advisory periods, increased adult visibility in and out of school, and positive contact with families.

Keywords: teachers/teacher-Adolescent Relationship, education policy, school context, classroom behavior/environment
Introduction

Exclusionary and punitive school discipline practices, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, have increasingly come under the national spotlight as information about their negative impacts on student’s life trajectories and glaring racial disparities has gained public attention. Several reports were recently issued recommending alternative practices to reduce suspension, and all emphasized the importance of establishing strong, healthy relationships built on trust and respect between school staff, students, and their families (Carter, Fine & Russell, 2014; Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin & Cohen, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Extant research does suggest a strong association between a range of academic and behavioral outcomes and students’ perceptions of teachers and administrators as caring and encouraging (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009).

However, less is known about the specific strategies educators use to strengthen connections with youth and their families, or the factors that motivate educators’ use of these approaches in the context of discipline reform. Reductions in the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion have been slow to take hold, and punitive approaches remain the predominant paradigm (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Given ongoing challenges in reducing suspensions and discipline disparities, it is imperative that research document specific practices being used in schools to reduce the use of exclusionary practices. Such information can inform the development of systematic interventions that can be tested more rigorously. This study aimed to identify the approaches used by school staff who work in low-suspending schools in a large metropolitan district, with a particular focus on their relational strategies.

School Discipline

The 1994 Gun Free Schools Act ushered in a tide of “zero-tolerance” policies that rely on
exclusionary discipline practices, including out-of-school suspension or expulsion, to remove students from the classroom or school as a form of punishment, usually for minor offenses like disruption, defiance, and disrespect (Skiba, 2000; Losen, & Martinez, 2013). Research shows these practices do not work and can actually be quite damaging to students’ developmental pathways (Skiba, 2000). Youth who experience exclusionary school discipline are more likely to do poorly in school, disengage from educational environments, and have juvenile justice contact or be arrested (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Gaenzle, Kim, Lin & Na, 2012; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Fabelo et al., 2011; Mowen & Brent, 2016). Students who attend schools with higher suspension rates tend to have weaker connections to school adults (Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2011; Removed for review, 2016a). The racially disparate impact of these policies have been documented for decades (Losen, & Martinez, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011). For example, the proportion of Black students receiving an out-of-school suspension has risen 120% since 1975, whereas the proportion of White students receiving an exclusionary discipline consequence has only grown 64% (Kinsler, 2011). Some argue that these racial disparities reflects differential perceptions of behavior by race at both the classroom and administrative levels (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

**Relationship Building**

Promising new shifts have occurred as school districts begin moving away from exclusionary practices towards those focused on building relationships and treating discipline as an opportunity to support students’ healthy social emotional development (Abregú, 2012). This movement is aligned with research indicating that supportive and genuine relationships is essential in creating a positive school climate, reducing problem behaviors, and lessening racial discipline gaps (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). Students’ perceptions of positive relationships
at school are predictors of a variety of behavior outcomes, such as fighting, substance use, skipping school, and academic success as measured by student grades (Woolley, Kol & Bowen, 2009; Removed for review, 2016b). Conversely, the absence of strong positive relationships is a predictor of negative psychological outcomes like depression, suicide attempts, and low self-esteem, along with adverse academic outcomes such as grade retention (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Myrick & Martorell, 2011). Building positive and meaningful relationships is important for all students, however, it is imperative that school staff intentionally cultivate relationships with students of color as these students often report feeling less safe among, and less connected to, adults in schools (Voight, Hanson, O’Malley, & Adekanye, 2015; Woolley et al., 2006; Removed for review, 2016a).

Methods

This qualitative study was designed to identify the discipline strategies used in low-suspending schools. Using a phenomenological approach, which is designed to explore the meaning of participants’ lived experiences, we conducted interviews and focus groups during which participants were asked to provide narratives about interventions and strategies that were essential in their school’s success in achieving local discipline reform goals (Padgett, 2012). Data were analyzed using inductive and deductive approaches to identify themes regarding efficacious approaches across schools. Preliminary codes were extracted from literature and also developed based on our district partners’ priorities for the project, while themes also inductively emerged from the data.

Study Context

This study took place in [removed for review] Public Schools as part of a partnership between the school district and the University of [removed for review] to: conduct rigorous and
relevant research on school discipline and racial disparities in exclusionary practices; collaborate with policy makers, administrators, educators, and local stakeholder groups to identify research questions, interpret results, and disseminate findings; and, strengthen and sustain efforts to connect research with local policy reforms and advocacy efforts. District partners were involved in all stages of this research study, from agenda setting and protocol development to the creation of coding schemes and analysis. As a result, our methods reflect not only the researchers’ values and preferred methodologies, but also the priorities of our community partner.

[Removed for review] Public Schools is a large urban school district in the Western United States with over 100,000 students in more than 200 schools. In 2014-2015, students enrolled in DPS were predominantly low income (70%) and children of color (56% Latino, 22% White, 14% Black, 3% Multiracial, 3% Asian, 1% Native American, and less than 1% Pacific Islander). Fifty-one percent of the student body was male, 40% were English Language Learners, and 12% were eligible for special education services. Suspension rates in district schools ranged from 0% to 48% with a mean of 5%.

DPS is an ideal district for studying school discipline and reforms. For although the issue has caught the attention of national media outlets and federal agencies in recent years (e.g. Lhamon & Samuels, 2014), only a small number of districts had voluntarily responded to the problem of racial discipline gaps with robust policy reforms (The White House, 2016). In contrast, DPS has been engaged in discipline reform for nearly ten years, after parents, students and community members organized for a new policy to address their concerns about racial disparities in exclusionary discipline practices and the growing school-to-prison pipeline. District guidelines encourage school administrators to minimize their use of exclusionary discipline practices, expand implementation of school-wide prevention programs, increase the use of
supportive discipline approaches like restorative practices, and track racial discipline gaps. The district set a goal of all schools having a suspension rate of 3% or lower for all students, and a 3% or lower rate specifically for Black students. These goals were based on Losen & Gillespie’s (2012) recommendations, which were informed by data from the 1970’s prior to the explosion of zero tolerance policies.

Protocol

Semi-structured interview and focus group protocols were developed based on a pilot study (Removed for review, 2016c), as well as the research literature about interventions and strategies that can reduce discipline disparities. In each participating school, an interview was conducted with an administrator (Principal, Dean, etc.) and a focus group was held with key personnel within the school such as a dean of culture, restorative justice coordinator, lead teacher, or school social worker. Both the interviews and focus groups were conducted using the same semi-structured protocols. Topics addressed in the interview protocol included: site-specific discipline policies, prevention and intervention programs, hiring practices, staffing structures, and professional development approaches. The only difference between the focus group and interview protocols was that in case of individual interviews, participants were asked to verbally list the most salient factors related to their school’s suspension rates and in focus groups, participants first generated these factors on post-it notes. Our motivation for conducting focus groups was to efficiently collect data from a wide variety of staff members’ about their perceptions of factors supporting low out-of-school suspension. We conducted interviews separately with administrators so as to provide a more candid space for administrators and their staff to speak about the issues, absent one another’s presence.
Sample

Although it is not typically the goal of qualitative research, the task from our community partner (the school district) was to generate findings that were representative of all low-suspending schools in the district. Therefore, we utilized a mixed-methods sampling approach by which we used quantitative data to purposively identify a group of schools for our qualitative study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The sample included 198 educators from 33 schools that were purposively selected based on achieving the district reform goal of having a suspension rate that was 3% or lower for all students, and for Black youth in particular, and having at least ten Black students (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

As illustrated in Table 1, the school sample was comprised of 19 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 4 high schools, and 8 schools with alternative grade configurations (e.g. K-12, K-8). Schools in the sample served predominantly students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch (56%, a proxy for poverty) and identified as students of color (43% Latino, 34% White, 13% Black, 4% Multiracial, 3% Asian and Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian). However, compared to the district as a whole, middle schools and those serving higher proportions of disadvantaged students (students of color, low-income youth, and students with disabilities) were underrepresented in our sample. This is not surprising given evidence that punitive and exclusionary practices, along with racial disparities, are more likely in highly segregated schools (Chapman, 2014; Payne & Welch, 2010; Removed for review, 2014).

In total, 198 educators participated in this study, the majority of whom were female (71%) and White (70%) (see Table 2). Nearly 60% had been at their current school less than five years, but over half of all participants had been working in education longer than ten years. Most of the sample was comprised of administrators or school leaders (39%), followed by teachers
and school-based service providers, such as social workers and psychologists (23%).

**Analytic Strategy**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using Dedoose qualitative software.

Analysis used both inductive and deductive techniques, with preliminary codes gleaned from a literature review and developed based on our district partners’ priority questions for the project. Iterative code development was driven by participant responses. We utilized both methods in order to capitalize on the richness of our data and to ensure that we captured themes that were not reflected in our a priori codes. In short, our aim was to explore existing ideas about school discipline but also allow for the possibility of new concepts to emerge. Coding occurred in three major cycles and all primary codes were assessed for inter-rater reliability across three researchers using Cohen’s Kappa ($k > .80$). We triangulated the multiple sources of data by analyzing findings from the focus groups and interviews simultaneously, as well as exploring comparisons across different school characteristics (e.g. grade-level and demographic composition).

**Findings**

Participants in this study were asked to speak to the strategies that they felt were most critical in their school’s ability to achieve a low suspension rate for all students and Black youth in particular. Throughout these conversations, one of the most common themes that emerged was the importance of relationship building - a strategy discussed by staff at all participating schools - even though this was not a topic that was specified in the interview or focus group protocols. In fact, there was a sentiment amongst many educators that “it’s all about the relationships” when preventing exclusionary discipline outcomes. As one participant described,

There’s a lot of schools of thought out there about relationships, if they are important at all. I will go to the end of the earth to say that that’s the number one thing, [but] there’s
other people that say you need academics and that’s it. I feel like you have to have rapport with the students. They have to know if you care about them first before they will go the extra mile.

Reiterating the role relationship building has on discipline, another participant shared:

I mean it's all about relationships, it's all about clear communication, it's all about redirecting behaviors and helping, you know, students to own the solution.

Echoing these thoughts, most staff members attributed their school’s low suspension rates to the strong connections that adults in the building established with students. The importance of relationships was discussed by participants at all grade levels (though less frequently in middle schools), but was shared most frequently by those serving higher proportions of students of color. Additionally, administrators and school staff showed similar degrees of support for relationship building.

**Rationale for Relationship Building**

Many educators in this study reported that strong student-staff relationships created the foundation for productive problem-solving in times of conflict. The development of these relationships was grounded in adults’ knowledge of students’ lives both inside and outside of school. Awareness of students’ strengths, triggers, coping resources, and areas of growth helped adults understand the underlying motivation behind misbehavior. Such knowledge and a deep understanding of students’ lives allowed adults to respond to misbehavior by implementing tailored and relevant consequences or interventions. Through relationship building with students, staff could identify and target the root cause of the problem (for example, low reading skills, lack of classroom rituals or routines, or trauma), rather than the symptom of acting out. Such personal knowledge about each student created the conditions for discipline to be viewed as an opportunity for growth and problem solving, rather than punishment. Staff members also felt students were more willing to take responsibility for their actions and were more motivated to
change when they trusted school adults. An educator reported, “If you’ve got a relationship with a student, they’re 100 times more likely to listen to you and understand and respond and try.”

Participants characterized these relationships as distinct from friendships because they were defined by mutual respect rather than affinity. Some participants characterized their approach as “warm-strict,” explaining that:

Warm comes down to genuinely showing that you care about each individual student through relationship building, taking an interest in their life outside of school, taking a lot of interest in their life inside of school and how they're doing and keeping tabs on things...Then, the strict side [is] that I am going to hold you accountable and follow up with you when you make a poor choice because I care so much about you.

This quote illustrates participants’ claims that effective student-staff relationships did not involve leniency or lowered expectations for young people, but rather were rooted in lovingly holding students accountable. Developing rapport through this warm-strict approach allowed for the creation of a sense of reciprocal obligation between staff members and students. Educators observed that strong relationships minimized problem behaviors and maximized the impact of interventions or consequences.

Although many relational approaches were relatively time-intensive, participants reported the investment yielded substantial benefits. For example, when asked to justify time dedicated to relationship building in the face of a high-stakes testing environment, a participant responded,

I would just say it pays off...I would point to different people who have amazing relationships with students and show them how high the teacher can go with rigor, how the teacher can get them to do that the teacher down the hall can’t get them to do. When [your relationships] are in order, it becomes easier for you to teach.

In general, educators reported that their commitment to relationship building was warranted because it paid dividends for both behavioral and academic outcomes.

Results indicate that participants held multiple and complementary rationales for their focus on building student-staff connections. The following section will outline the specific
approaches they deployed towards this end.

**Strategies for Relationship Building**

In defining strategies for relationship building between school staff members and students, several practices were outlined: home visits, positive contact with caregivers, greetings, morning meetings, advisory periods, and staff visibility throughout the school day and during after-school activities. Many participants reported that they conducted home visits as part of the Parent-Teacher Home Visitation Program of the local school district. Home visits provided school staff the opportunity to develop new insights about their students’ lives. A secondary school leader observed that, “Home visits change the relationship. Once you’re in someone’s home, that opens everyone’s eyes to a different sort of encounter that’s not about grades, it’s not about attendance.”

Another consistently noted approach for relationship building was to use the beginning of the day as an opportunity to check in with students, learn about their lives, build community, and set a positive tone for the rest of the day. Specific practices included greetings, advisory periods that integrate social-emotional learning, and regularly held classroom-based, grade-level, or school-wide morning meetings. A secondary school teacher reported, “It used to be check for dress code or gum, and now it’s check for tears, check for an angry countenance, check for like a kid walking on clouds and figure out why.”

Finally, participants reported that increased visibility of adults throughout the school day and during after-school-activities supported relationship building. One educator shared examples,

like being outside when they drop off their kids or pick their kids up, it’s going to the sports games, and sitting-sitting with parents, it’s just that just that constant presence…yeah, showing up and so they…they know who you are.
Some schools encouraged teachers to make themselves visible during lunches and passing periods, and administrators deepened their involvement with students by leading activities in classrooms. School staff also used time outside of school to get to know students by attending school-sponsored or community-based sporting events, recitals, or field trips. These approaches created opportunities for students and staff to identify common interests and supported discussions around topics outside of academics. For example, a participant described how staff members made extra efforts to build relationships with their students by being present in their lives in and outside of school:

I know all of us go the extra mile to build relationships with our students. I mean it’s beyond definitely what other schools do...I mean I’m just thinking about one of our fifth grade teachers, you know recently she just went to go watch one of her students perform in a dance recital and she brought along another student who also wanted to go. And then they all went out to dinner afterwards...Even though maybe not all of us have time to do that all the time, it is much more common to find teachers who are going to go out of their way to somehow build that relationship...Teachers will find a way to take that time, take a moment, find a moment to pull that kid aside and talk to the kid, or you know to do something with the kid, or notice something, to just build that relationship...You know that doesn’t happen everywhere.

The vast majority of discussions about relationships were focused on the students themselves; however, some participants also spoke about relationships with families as central to addressing discipline and behavior concerns in school. In terms of strategies, home visits were again mentioned as a “great way to get that relationship going and involving the whole family.” Participants stressed that it was important to communicate with caregivers prior to a discipline incident so that a relationship was in place if challenging behavior became an issue. An elementary school staff member described the approach of making “positive phone calls home” in which caregivers were contacted when a student did something well:

Positive phone calls home, and so again...building relationships with the parents. But you know, you’re not calling home just because of a bad decision made that day on a student but really seeking out, and again that’s mindset – always looking for something good.
Partnering with families to collectively develop effective interventions when challenging behavior did occur was another building block to relationships with families. A principal shared his staff members’ approach:

We worked very hard trying to get parents in for a meeting that was really messaged as, look we love this kid, you love this kid, we all love each other and...we want student A to be successful...In order for student A to be successful we really want to be on the same page and communicate...We want to communicate both those good days and those bad days...Almost all cases with these frequent flyers...I probably knew or know most of the parents by first name and really work on the relationship with those parents.

Another study participated noted the importance of partnering with families:

I believe that relationship building is the most important thing to help reduce out of school suspensions. And I think always going to the least, if there is any way you can do something creative, if you can have a conversation with the parents and say look, this happened, normally I suspend, I need you- come let’s talk. Can you counsel your child at home? Can you help me with this one? What can we do together to help your child understand that this is not a good choice the school wants them here and you want to spend the day here at school. What can we do? Again, relationships.

In summary, participants in this study identified that relationship building with both students and families as a key strategy for reducing their reliance on suspension as a discipline practice. They used a variety of approaches - home visits, positive calls home, morning meetings, staff visibility, and greetings - but all were based on the principle that knowing the “whole” child, including their families, would pay dividends in terms of students’ behavior at school and establish the conditions necessary for educational achievement.

**Discussion**

Authentic and supportive student-staff relationships have been identified by scholars in the field as important levers in creating a positive school climate, minimizing problem behaviors, and reducing racial discipline gaps (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). Given the ample amount of
research suggesting relationship building plays a positive role in students social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, it is crucial for scholars to document specific relationship building strategies and the implicit theories of change that motivate their use so that they can be tested using methods that allow for causal inference (Hall-Lande et al., 2007; Myrick & Martorell, 2011; Woolley, Kol & Bowen, 2009; Removed for review, 2016a).

Overwhelmingly, school leaders noted that building relationships played a key role not only in the general climate of their building, but also in the school’s lower suspension rates for all students and specifically with Black youth. School leaders noted the importance of knowing about students’ lives and understanding their triggers in order to pinpoint underlying explanations for behavior. Building relationships with students transformed discipline processes from a one-sided administrative process to more of a conversational personal development opportunity. Although participants recognized that many approaches to build relationships with students and families took time, and in some cases, money, they felt the payoff was well worth the resources.

Findings indicate several strategies schools can implement to build relationships with students within schools in order to impact disparate discipline outcomes. Some approaches are more time intensive, such as advisory periods, several others are simple and relatively quick, like morning meetings and staff presence during transition times. Study participants noted that presence of staff during passing periods and lunches created opportunities to connect with students, which often resulted in deeper classroom involvement. Participants also suggested an easy approach to relationship building was to use the start of the school day as a space where staff could quickly check in with students through brief structured activities or games. Greeting students at the door and short morning classroom community building activities were ways
schools implemented this approach. Not only did participants find this useful in building
relationships, they also felt it set a positive tone for the day. More time consuming approaches
included implementing home visit programs, which participants found offered a window into
students’ lives and strengthened connections to caregivers. However, schools may find this
challenging to implement without financial support to compensate staff members for their time
outside of the typical school day. The second more intensive approach was offering advisory
periods in which classes met for a set amount of time to build community and address students’
individual social or emotional needs.

Although much of the study’s findings centered on relationship building between
students, teachers, and administrators, participants also noted the importance of building bridges
with families. Engaging with parents, making phone calls home, holding family meetings, and
simply keeping families informed as to their child’s experiences in school were commonly
reported. Study participants also noted that establishing a positive relationship with families
before problems arose made it less challenging to discussing concerns if they did happen.

A limited body of empirical research provides support for a just few of these relational
approaches. Parent-teacher home visits have not been extensively evaluated, but emerging
evidence from non-peer reviewed sources indicates they can lead to improved communication,
enhanced individual instruction, increased academic success and attendance (Christiansen, 2015;
Sheldon & Jung, 2015). Morning meetings are a central component of the Responsive Classroom
intervention, which has shown efficacy in promoting positive behavioral outcomes in a
longitudinal randomized clinical trial (Rimm-Kaufman et al, 2014). Similarly, experimental
studies of My Teaching Partner, which emphasizes teacher-student relationship building in part
through interactions that focus on young people’s interests, concerns, and perspectives has
shown promise in reducing office disciplinary referrals, and racial disparities (Gregory et al., 2015). It remains unknown whether these approaches are effective as stand-alone interventions. Additional experimental research is needed to identify whether these strategies have utility when used individually or in different combinations.

**Limitations**

Several limitations in design should be taken into account when considering study findings. First, we purposively selected schools that had low suspension rates to identify promising practices that could be the focus of more rigorous evaluation. This focus led to a sample of schools that served higher percentages of advantaged students. It is possible that relationship-building strategies would look different in schools serving even higher proportions of low-income students and youth of color, and this is an important area for future research. Moreover, this study was unable to identify whether the strategies described are unique to low suspending schools because it does not include a comparison group of schools with higher suspension rates. Future studies could address the limitations of this research by including a broader sample of schools with greater variation in suspension rates and student demographic composition.

**Conclusion**

This study adds to an emerging body of literature indicating that relationship building with school-aged youth may be a key method for reducing exclusionary discipline outcomes and racial disparities. Participants reported that relationships open a path for educators into understanding student misbehavior in context. With this knowledge, response patterns can shift from punitive and exclusionary practices typically employed to align with warm-strict approaches to discipline. Further research is needed to determine whether the strategies reported
by educators have a causal impact on positive student-staff relationships and exclusionary discipline outcomes.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by [Removed for Review] Public Schools for the evaluation of their discipline reform policy.
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### Tables

#### Table 1: School Sample Characteristics (n=33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Configuration</th>
<th>% or mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>% Non-Traditional Schools (e.g. K-8, 6-12)</td>
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<td>% Middle Schools</td>
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<td>% High Schools</td>
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<table>
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<th>Management Type</th>
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<td>% Innovation Schools</td>
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<th>Student Composition</th>
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<td>% Students of Color</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Eligible for Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</td>
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<tr>
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#### Table 2: Participant Sample Characteristics (n=198)

| Demographics                                      | % or Mean | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Female                                            | 71        |
| White                                             | 73        |
| Black                                             | 10        |
| Latino                                            | 12        |
| Other                                             | 5         |

<p>| Professional background                           | % or Mean | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Years in education                               | 12        |
| Years at school                                  | 5         |
| School leader/administrator                       | 39        |
| Teacher                                           | 28        |
| School-based service provider                     | 23        |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale for relationship building</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Relationship building with students | ● There’s not a teacher in this building who wouldn’t argue that relationships are the most important...thing to help reduce out of school suspensions.  
● When you take times to build those relationships with kids, they don’t want to disappoint you, and when they do, they want to talk it through. They want to know… how they can repair the harm |
| Relationship building with families | ● What it boils down to at the end of the day is strong relationships with kids and families.  
● Developing those relationships with parents early on so they trust you to work through the situation with their child and they can give you input on working with their child is really helpful. |
| **Skills, steps or strategies used to build relationships** | |
| Home visits | ● We at our school participated in a home visit program...And I think that’s been key, for teachers, for staff, just building those relationships not only with the kiddos but with those parents. So that they can, if a situation comes up, have all the more support from the parents because of that positive relationship that they’ve built. |
| Positive contact with caregivers | ● The advisors reach out to the parents and just let them know, like, hey my name is such and such, I’m your child’s advisor...here’s a little bit of something about me, and can you tell me something about, you and what your desires for your kids and...you know, what do you want to see them accomplish this year, is there anything I should know? |
| Greetings | ● There’s intentionality in saying “good morning” to people, using people’s names, getting to know people. |
| Morning meetings | ● It’s mandatory that every classroom is having that you know, thirty, thirty-five minute morning meeting every morning. That’s our leadership at our school saying, “You need to take the time to build relationships, like it’s not that you don’t have time, we’re giving you the time to do that.” |
| Advisory periods | ● [Relationship building] really plays out in our advisory structure, so students probably have the best relationship with their advisor and that's kind of their go to adult in the building. |
| Staff visibility | ● Like being outside when they drop off their kids or pick their kids up, it’s going to the sports games, and sitting with parents, it’s just that just that constant presence...yeah, showing up and so they...they know who you are, and they’re building relationships. |

Table 3: Study Findings
School-Wide Restorative Practices: Step by Step
The Denver School-Based Restorative Practices Partnership is a coalition that includes Advancement Project, Denver Classroom Teachers Association, Denver Public Schools, National Education Association, and Padres & Jóvenes Unidos.

The content of this guide was written in working groups comprised of representatives of the partner organizations, allies in the community, and the knowledgeable staff of North High School, Skinner Middle School, and Hallett Fundamental Academy in Denver, CO.

This implementation guide builds upon the first report issued by the Denver School-Based Restorative Practices Partnership, Taking Restorative Practices School-Wide: Insights from three schools in Denver, written by Yolanda Anyon, MSW, Ph.D., of the University of Denver’s Graduate School of Social Work.

Our work has been made possible through the generous and continued support of Denver Public Schools, Colorado Education Association, and National Education Association’s Center for Great Public Schools and Office of Minority Community Organizing & Partnerships.

It is the passionate students, families, and educators working to end the school-to-prison pipeline that will bring this guide to life.
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INTRODUCTION

Is this guide for me?

This guide is written for educators, families, and community members who understand that traditional, punitive discipline policies and practices are ineffective, do not support students, and have a disproportionate impact on students of color. This guide hopes to build the capacity of educators and community members to implement a positive approach to discipline in the form of restorative practices.

Restorative practices build community and promote healthy relationships among educators and students in order to teach the social-emotional and conflict-resolution skills necessary to reduce conflict. This guide provides support to any school building or district looking to reform their discipline system and reduce racial disparities. It answers the critical question: where do we start? This guide can also help schools or districts that have started along this path but are struggling with implementation.

Why should restorative practices be implemented?

In communities across the country, school discipline policies became increasingly more punitive in the 1980s in response to the call for “zero tolerance” of youth behavior. The use of exclusionary discipline policies, such as suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement, increased for even the most minor of offenses, like being late to school or talking in class. Rather than support students in their development, these school policies push students out of the classroom and hinder opportunities for quality education. For some students, “zero tolerance” means graduating high school with a police record. For many others, these discipline policies push them out of school long before graduation. Rarely do these harsh practices change student behavior; rather they actually worsen students’ attitudes towards school by removing them from class and isolating them from their peers. By failing to address the adult behavior that often triggers or escalates student behavior, these practices can also damage the sense of community within a school.

These exclusionary and criminalizing discipline practices are a powerful aspect of the racial inequalities that pervade public schooling, from disparate dropout and graduation rates, to rates of referral to special education and gifted education, and differences in school funding and resourcing. Racial disparities are of particular concern when the disciplinary category is subjective and affected by cultural perception. For example, suspensions for “insubordination,” “defiance,” “disrespect,” “refusal to obey school rules,” and “disruption” have been shown to exhibit very high racial disparities, and have led some districts to ban them as a solution. In what has come to be known as the school-to-prison pipeline, students of color are far more likely than their white peers to be alienated from school through punishment, put into contact with law enforcement at school, and pushed towards a jail cell for the same behavior as their white peers.

“Restorative practices build community and promote healthy relationships among educators and students in order to teach the social-emotional and conflict-resolution skills necessary to reduce conflict.”
Using approaches such as dialogues, peace circles, conferencing, and peer-led mediation, restorative practices get to the root cause of student behavior, which often relates to adult behavior. A restorative culture seeks to address the missing piece of teaching social-emotional and conflict-resolution skills by turning behaviors into learning opportunities. Accepting responsibility for behaviors and making right what has been wronged is the goal of the learning opportunity. Using this model in the school community still allows each educator to have his/her own expectations and forms of accountability. As much as possible, students are responsible to their teachers for classroom expectations and behavior. When a student does not respond to the classroom accountability system, a student may be referred to a support staff member for a more intensive intervention aimed at helping the student make better behavioral choices. The ultimate goal in addressing all behaviors is to ensure a supportive and stable educational environment while encouraging growth towards self-discipline, accepting responsibility, and appreciating the rights of others. When fully implemented with a race-conscious lens, restorative practices improve school climate, increase academic achievement and reduce racial disparities in school discipline.

Who created this implementation guide?
The Denver School-Based Restorative Practices Partnership (Partnership) is a coalition of racial justice, education, labor and community groups working to ensure widespread and high-quality implementation of restorative practices in Denver Public Schools and beyond. Through this partnership, the youth and parent group, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos; the national racial justice organization, Advancement Project; the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA), Denver Public Schools (DPS), and the National Education Association (NEA), with assistance from the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver (DU); have documented successful restorative practices in three Denver schools. Working together with school-based representatives, the Partnership is now sharing the model for success with districts across the country that are seeking to replicate, scale, and sustain these practices. Denver Public Schools’ story of adopting restorative practices is undoubtedly unique. The revolutionary reforms made in Denver—including an overhaul of the district’s discipline policies, an agreement between the district and the police that specifies the role of officers in schools, and a statewide law that addresses the ineffectiveness of “zero tolerance” policies and required schools to implement “proportionate” discipline —were driven by a high-profile, racial justice community organizing campaign in response to schools’ reliance on out-of-school suspensions to address discipline problems. In partnership with the community, DPS radically changed its discipline policies, moving away from exclusionary discipline policies and paving the way for positive approaches like restorative practices. Applying over $1 million in state grants, DPS piloted restorative practices in 2006 at one high school and three middle schools. The following year, the program expanded to four additional schools. The primary focus at these schools was a diversion program—a means to refer behavioral issues that often resulted in suspension, expulsion, or police referral to the Restorative Practices (RP) Coordinator for mediation. Instead of receiving tickets, students participated in victim-offender mediation practices facilitated by the RP Coordinator. Once the funding ended, a few of the schools continued the work by finding creative ways to maintain the program out of their own school budgets proving that, while outside funding is certainly helpful and can create incentives for schools to try new approaches, it is not necessary for implementation.
Denver is hardly alone in implementing restorative practices in schools to end punitive discipline and address racial disparities. Programs have emerged in San Francisco, Oakland, Minneapolis, and Chicago among other cities. Best practices have been adopted from these, and other models, some of which did not have access to funding as the pilot schools in Denver did. It is the “home grown” nature of restorative practices implementation in Denver, driven by community voices and individual school leaders, that the Partnership has captured in this guide.

The structure of the Partnership has ensured the perspectives of all major stakeholders are represented: the school district, the educators, and the students and their families. Created through work with both the partners and school-based representatives, this guide is a roadmap to school-wide restorative practices implementation.

The goals and strategies outlined in this report are aspirational and may not all be feasible due to limitations of funding, and/or district policies. Every school building is unique and schools need to prioritize what truly reflects their realities. However, readers should be encouraged that the approaches outlined in this guide have been implemented in schools throughout the country, in many cases without new funding or district reforms.

Navigating the implementation Guide

In the restorative practices community, it is generally accepted that it takes three to five years to implement RP in schools, to shift the mindset from punitive to restorative. As it has been proven successful in Denver, implementation can be done in stages. A school or a district can start with one practice and incorporate others as the school culture shifts. This guide has been structured accordingly—outlining the critical steps to be taken in the first year of implementation, how to grow in the second year, and elements to support sustainability of implementation. The guide includes a wide range of resources, from suggested literature on restorative practices to sample forms a principal might send home to parents explaining the philosophy, that the Partnership hopes will support implementation at all schools regardless of previous experience in restorative practices.

In February of 2016, the Partnership released the report *Taking Restorative Practices School-wide: Insights from Three Schools in Denver*. Through interviews and focus groups with school leaders and staff members from a high school, middle school, and elementary school in Denver, four essential strategies for implementing restorative practices school-wide were identified: strong principal vision and commitment to RP; explicit efforts to generate staff buy-in to this conflict-resolution approach; continuous and intensive professional development opportunities; and, the allocation of school funds for a full-time coordinator of RP at the site. This guide supports the development of these four strategies and others that we have identified for long-term sustainability.
The first year of implementation is arguably the most critical. The first year sets the tone for the culture shift by proving to educators and students that restorative practices work and that this approach is ultimately best for the school community. For that reason, school leadership should assess readiness for implementation before embarking on this work.

Through interviews and focus groups with staff members at three Denver schools that have successfully implemented restorative practices, four criteria that contributed to success in taking this approach school-wide were identified. School leadership should ensure a readiness or a willingness to grow in these areas before beginning implementation:

- **Principal Vision and Commitment:** It is critical that school leaders believe in the strategy and communicate to staff the expectation that “restorative practices is what we do here.” The principal must be clear in the purpose of implementing restorative practices and unafraid to speak to racial disparities in discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. The principal must believe that students’ time in class is a key factor in determining their educational success. The principal must believe that teaching social-emotional and conflict-resolution skills will positively affect behavior and improve performance in the building.

- **Staff Buy-In:** In order to be successful with restorative practices, most educators in the building should actively support and engage in this approach. It may be hard to gauge staff buy-in before implementation has begun; however, school leadership can involve educators early in the development stages to assess the willingness to transform school culture. A level of trust between educators and administrators is certainly helpful as restorative practices often require educators to be vulnerable, especially in taking accountability for how their actions and biases often escalate student behavior, in a way that exclusionary discipline practices do not.

- **Professional Development:** Ongoing and intensive professional development, that includes role-playing of restorative dialogues, should be provided for all educators in the building. This professional development needs to happen throughout the year and should be paired with frequent observation and coaching sessions. Professional development should be responsive to school needs--what strategies are educators struggling to implement, which students are being referred most often and why--and should include role-playing of scenarios occurring in the building. School leadership must be prepared to allocate a significant amount of time to restorative practice trainings and trainings in philosophies that support RP.

- **Full Time RP Coordinator:** Rather than add restorative practices to the workload of an existing administrator or other staff member, the time intensive nature of this approach requires a full-time coordinator for school-wide implementation. Schools short on funding may choose to train a family or community volunteer, reassign an existing staff member to this role, or have multiple staff members share the responsibilities outlined in this guide; however, it is important that, at all times, someone in the building is serving as the RP Coordinator, building relationships among the school community. Rather than holding past experience in restorative practices, it is far more important that this person is passionate about the vision, and confident that they can build community and repair trust between educators and students.

A school is ready to commence implementation when school leadership is prepared to hire a full time RP Coordinator, dedicate professional learning time to RP and strategies that support it, convince staff to transform school culture, and adhere to this new philosophy despite resistance and obstacles.
Year One
Implementation Benchmarks

At the end of the first year of implementation of restorative practices, a school should meet the following benchmarks, which were generated by representatives from Denver schools with strong restorative cultures and experts in the field. In future years of implementation, the benchmarks will continue to serve as both a measure of a school’s success and a tool to identify areas of needed improvement.

**Benchmark 1: There is a common understanding of why restorative practices are being implemented.**
The principal’s purpose behind the change to restorative practices can clearly be expressed by educators, students, and families. Educators express an understanding of the purpose of restorative practices implementation. Educators are well-versed in the negative implications of exclusionary discipline practices, particularly the harmful impact they have on students of color and at-risk youth. There are early signs of a shift in mindset from punitive to restorative.

**Benchmark 2: Foundational structures to support RP implementation are in place.**
A team of educators, each of whom have a clearly defined role, is in place to lead implementation and sustain restorative practices in the building. This behavior team meets consistently and has streamlined communication with the entire staff. The team is responsible for structuring professional development and utilize staff input to increase buy-in (See Year One: Establishing Roles). In addition, a clear referral system is established for both educators and students to refer individuals to the restorative process.

**Benchmark 3: A method of collecting and analyzing data is developed.**
In addition to determining key indicators to track and goals to achieve, educators know what data will be collected and how. Likewise, there are protocols for analysis. The data is used to inform changes to the discipline system and future goals, as well as prove to staff and community members the effectiveness of restorative practices in creating a positive school climate and reducing exclusionary disciplinary practices and the disparities that accompany them.

**Benchmark 4: Educators, both new and returning, are trained in restorative practices.**
This training is both intensive and ongoing. Educators are provided with resources to assist with implementation and provided frequent feedback, most likely from the RP Coordinator, on restorative practices used in their individual classrooms and throughout the school building.

**Benchmark 5: Restorative language and culture have been established.**
Restorative questions are used, not only in formal mediations, but in the hallways, classrooms, and staff meetings to address conflict. Signage in the building encourages the use of restorative language in all settings. School leadership uses restorative language, not just with students, but with staff and families. As part of this new culture, educators should be able to have productive conversations around the role race and adult behavior plays in adult-student interactions.

**Benchmark 6: Families and students are well-informed of the shift to restorative practices.**
Students and families have been introduced to the new philosophy of restorative versus punitive discipline. Ongoing training is made available to students and family members to promote understanding of the vision and use of common language. Student and family voice is valued in the school decision-making process.

**Benchmark 7: Preventative measures, not just reactive measures, are being taken to improve school climate.**
By the end of the first year, the behavior team is not only reacting to incidents and conflicts, but able to focus on preventative work. Educators and the RP Coordinator work to proactively build relationships with all students. This change of focus is proof that restorative practices are reducing the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices as well as buy-in from the school community.

The following portion of the Implementation Guide includes a timeline of the necessary steps to reach these Year 1 benchmarks. Also included is a description of how existing staff in your building or new restorative staff will work to support implementation of restorative practices in the first year and years to come.
When establishing the structures necessary to support the implementation of restorative practices, it is critical to clearly define the roles of staff members in the process. Below is a description of roles and responsibilities of the principal, the Behavior Team, the RP Coordinator, and the whole staff in implementing restorative practices.

In this document, the word educator will be used to describe any adult in the building that interacts with students, from cafeteria workers to paraprofessionals to teachers. The word teacher will be used when speaking to certified staff working in classrooms with students. The word administrator will be used when speaking specifically to building leadership.

Principal
As with any school initiative, school-wide RP implementation cannot succeed unless the principal shares in the core values of restorative practices: relationships, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration. Principals should have, or be willing to work towards a strong belief in restorative practices, a vision to implement RP with integrity, and a readiness to hold others accountable to that vision. The principal is ultimately responsible for ensuring that this new approach becomes the expectation. While the principal may choose not to be a part of the Behavior Team meetings, it is important to have a protocol for communication between the principal and those responsible for implementation.

The principal’s responsibilities include:
• Ensuring staff understanding of restorative practices and why it is being implemented
• Honoring programs and frameworks that are currently in place and explaining how they support restorative practices
• Maintaining the expectation that all staff - from the classroom to the discipline office - use restorative practices to build relationships and respond to discipline incidents
• Communicating with students, families, and the community about restorative practices
• Including the Behavior Team or RP Coordinator in weekly communication
• Evaluating the RP Coordinator

“As with any school initiative, school-wide RP implementation cannot succeed unless the principal shares in the core values of restorative practices: relationships, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration.”
**Behavior Team**

In many non-restorative schools, discipline staff and educators respond to student discipline concerns in isolation from one another. Sometimes in the same building, some educators will be trying to punish and push a student out, while other educators are trying to support the student to stay. In schools that implement RP, a Behavior Team brings together the various supports students might need and streamlines communication between educators and administrators.

**An ideal Behavior Team could include:**

- RP Coordinator
- An administrator
- Social-emotional representative—social worker, school psychologist, etc.
- Special education representative—case manager, expert in student disabilities and the requirements of IDEA, paraprofessional
- Deans
- Security
- Teacher
- Nurse
- Any other building staff who hold strong, influential relationships with students, particularly at-risk youth (will depend on the building but could include after-school program provider, cafeteria worker, etc.)

If a school is unable to coordinate meetings that include the above representatives, it is essential to establish an avenue for communication with all staff. For example, rather than have a teacher on the Behavior Team, the RP Coordinator might update staff at weekly meetings.

The Behavior Team should meet weekly to review punitive and restorative discipline data and address concerning trends, such as:

- Which students, addressing both individuals and larger demographics, are being referred most often? What are the root causes? What supports can we offer?
- Which students, addressing both individuals and larger demographics, are being referred that were not before? What are the root causes of this change in behavior? What supports can we offer?
- What are the rising behaviors seen throughout the school? What are the root causes? What is our plan to address this rising behavior?

The Behavior Team should work collaboratively to review data and problem solve. They should develop individualized behavior plans for students of concern that reflect evidence-based practices (e.g. functional behavioral assessments) and address contextual influences (e.g. peers, rituals, and routines) on behavior. As part of this process, lines of communication with families should be opened, with the understanding that caregivers are experts in their children’s lives and may have useful insights or suggestions about how to address their behavior at school.

**RP Coordinator**

Through focus groups and interviews with representatives from schools that practice restorative discipline, the Partnership concluded that at least one full-time coordinator of restorative practices was necessary to take this approach school-wide. This reflects how time-intensive restorative practices can be in comparison to exclusionary discipline actions that push students out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Schools that have struggled with funding have often reassigned a staff member to this role who has proven strong in relationship-building.

The RP Coordinator’s responsibilities can best be divided into three categories: reactive restorative practices, proactive/preventative restorative practices, and RP training.
In response to behavior concerns, the RP Coordinator should:

- Support students and teachers inside the classroom through observation, coaching, modeling restorative language, and debriefing with both teachers and individual students
- Monitor individual student behavior by checking in with students throughout the school day
  - Facilitate mediations in response to conflict
  - Among students
  - Between educators and students
  - Among educators
  - Between family members and educators
  - Among groups of students, educators, or family members
- Follow through after mediations to ensure the harm was repaired
- Develop creative interventions for students as part of the restorative resolution
- Inform families, educators, and administrators about incidents in school as needed, with the assistance of the Behavior Team
- Organize data to inform the Behavior Team of any negative trends in school climate

In order to improve school climate and prevent future behavior issues, the RP Coordinator should:

- Spend time in classrooms to build relationships with students and teachers
- Organize school data to inform staff of any positive trends in school climate
- Gather testimonials of RP success stories to improve staff and community buy-in
- Circulate throughout the building to build and foster relationships with students and educators
- Use peace circles to build a sense of community
- Cultivate advocates for RP among educators, students, families, and community members
- Advocate for educators and students, especially in Behavior Team meetings
- Communicate with the community about the restorative work being done within the building
- Establish an avenue for educators and students to express concerns about the process

To further the understanding of restorative practices in the school community, the RP Coordinator should:

- Provide ongoing restorative practices professional development to staff
- Observe staff and provide frequent, non-evaluative feedback
- Offer trainings to families in restorative practices so a common language is being used at home
- Teach students techniques for resolving conflict
- Coach students and educators on how to participate in meaningful restorative conversations

The role of the RP Coordinator is not limited to what has been outlined. Whether participating in a school tradition or supporting a new initiative, the coordinator should constantly be asking, “How can I add a restorative lens to this?”

Whole Staff

It is imperative to school-wide implementation that individual staff members commit to being restorative in and out of the classroom. As this approach is relationship-intensive, it is perhaps most important that staff maintain a willingness to be vulnerable to others and open to learning new strategies.

Throughout implementation, all staff members should:

- Stay informed of the content of Behavior Team meetings
- Engage in mediations with students, other staff members, and families
- Participate in restorative practices professional development
- Use restorative dialogue throughout the school building and expect students to do the same
- Maintain a growth mindset that emphasizes improvement over accomplishment and views students’ and staff members’ behavior as amenable to change
- Work to build relationships through the use of restorative practices like affective statements or circles
Timeline for Year One Implementation

This portion of the guide includes steps to be taken during the first year of implementation in order to reach the Year One Benchmarks. Additional resources are provided in the Appendix to support these steps.

Summer and planning weeks
Before the first day of school, members of the school community need to establish the systems that will be used for implementation, create or revise school materials to support restorative practices, and train staff and set the vision for this new approach. While some of this work can be done during the planning weeks before students are present, a significant amount of time during the summer months should be dedicated to preparation. If funding summer work proves difficult, most can be accomplished during the previous spring.

Benchmark 1: Identify the purpose of restorative practices:
• The principal must be able to clearly speak to the purpose for implementing restorative practices at the school
• Access and review disaggregated data that shows exclusionary school disciplinary practices - suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement - are not effective and/or are racially disproportionate in their use to show why a culture shift is necessary

Benchmark 2: Establish foundational structures for implementation:
• Hire a full time RP Coordinator or reassign a person in the building to this position
• Establish who will serve on the Behavior Team and begin building knowledge of RP and strengthening relationships amongst team members:
  - Provide summer readings and professional development for those who will serve on the Behavior Team
  - Host a retreat for the members of the Behavior Team to establish the vision - an outside facilitator might prove helpful
  - Schedule Behavior Team meetings and establish a protocol for those meetings
  - Create the avenues of communication between the Behavior Team and staff
  - Establish a common language to be used among staff and students that can appear on posters, referral forms, quick reference tools, etc.
• Create a referral system, including necessary forms to be completed and tracking systems, for:
  - Educators to refer students to the RP Coordinator if the student must leave the classroom
  - Educators, students, or families to refer a conflict for restorative mediation
• Develop avenues for feedback that allow educators, families, and students to share experiences with the restorative process, such as:
  - Weekly meetings
  - Focus groups
  - One-on-one check ins

Benchmark 3: Utilize a process to collect and analyze data:
• Select which data will be reviewed in the first year
• Utilize a system, including any necessary tools, for sharing the data with educators and the school community
• Examine the previous school year’s data, paying particular attention to root cause, disproportionality, and frequency of discipline, to determine goals for the first year of implementation
Benchmark 4: Train new and returning educators:
- Coordinate a strategy to communicate the transition to restorative practices to staff, emphasizing the vision of the principal and the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline practices
- Create a staff manual to provide educators with as many resources as possible from the beginning of the year, including:
  - data to show the need for the shift
  - articles on the benefits of RP
  - outlines of new procedures
- Use feedback from members of the Behavior Team, following their summer retreat, to improve restorative practices professional development offerings
- Invite educators to optional summer trainings - a great opportunity to create allies for restorative practices
- Once educators return from the summer, train all staff in restorative practices to be used in their classrooms. Use role-playing in trainings on:
  - Restorative questions
  - Affective statements
  - Peace circles

Benchmark 5: Begin to establish restorative culture and language in the building:
- Schedule time during the planning weeks to build relationships among the staff, RP Coordinator, and Behavior Team
- Revise the school’s behavior handbook to ensure that restorative practices are included in the discipline protocol or decision-making tree in response to different offenses
  - Eliminate suspensions and expulsions as a consequence for minor infractions
  - Define minor versus major infractions
- Apply a restorative lens to the handbook—perhaps even adding restorative questions to student planners
- Ensure the environment of the school is restorative by creating posters and signage to hang in the hallways to support a restorative conversation
- Model productive conversations around race by demonstrating the importance of asking questions, admitting mistakes, and contributing to the analysis and development of solutions around disparities in school discipline data
- Model conversations around adult behavior for all educators, emphasizing the role adult behavior often plays in escalating student behavior

Benchmark 6: Inform families and students of the shift to restorative practices:
- Develop a strategy to communicate the transition to restorative practices to families through various mediums
  - Letters and calls home to families
  - Informational meetings for families the school year or summer prior to implementation to explain restorative practices and why school leadership has chosen this path
  - Announcements on social media outlets/school website
  - Data sharing to explain why restorative practices is necessary
- Prepare students for the shift to a restorative school climate
  - Hold class meetings during the previous school year to explain restorative practices and the reasoning behind the shift
  - Use time in advisory/homeroom or designate time within the school day to explain how this change in school culture will impact students
  - Onboard restorative practices with students in the building over the summer months in order to begin establishing relationships with students and build student advocates for restorative practices

Benchmark 7: Take preventative measures to improve school climate:
- Identify students of concern as a team, particularly those that might struggle with the transition, so that the RP Coordinator can prioritize building positive relationships with these students and their families.
First Month of School

In the first month of the school year, the focus of implementation will be establishing a new school climate through community building and trainings for families, educators, and students. It is critical during this time to analyze data, build belief in the approach, and identify any necessary early interventions.

**Benchmark 1: Stand by the purpose of restorative practices:**
- Continue to communicate the vision to staff, students, and families at school assemblies, parent-teacher association meetings, and staff meetings
- Host time to talk to educators, students, and families as they participate in the process for the first time to ensure restorative practices are being implemented with fidelity

**Benchmark 2: Strengthen foundational structures for implementation:**
- Schedule time to talk with educators, both in groups and individuals, about the progress of implementation and the use of foundational structures including:
  - The referral process
  - Communication from the Behavior Team
  - Avenues for feedback

**Benchmark 3: Collect and analyze data to inform next steps:**
- Synthesize early data to target areas of concern with implementation
- Refine data collection and analysis at the weekly Behavior Team meetings
- Identify success stories to be used to build community buy-in
- Survey educators, students, and families for feedback on adjusting to the new school climate

**Benchmark 4: Continue to train all educators:**
- Provide ongoing professional development, including role-playing scenarios educators are experiencing
- Continue to model RP conversations for staff
- Conduct coaching for educators to inform necessary supports and early interventions
  - The RP Coordinator or another non-evaluative member of the Behavior Team is best suited for these observations
  - General data from these observations should be shared at future trainings. For example, “18 out of 25 teachers have been observed using RP in their classrooms this week”
  - If individual coaching conversations and role-playing do not help struggling educators, administrators should be called in to provide additional support

**Benchmark 5: Build restorative culture and language in the building:**
- The RP Coordinator goes into classrooms to build relationships with and to support both students and teachers
- The RP Coordinator hosts time to talk with educators, both in groups and individuals, about the progress of implementation
- The Behavior Team facilitates discussion with staff around often difficult topics such as adult behavior and its impact on student behavior in an effort to normalize these conversations

**Benchmark 6: Involve families and students in the shift to restorative practices:**
- Ensure all students attend a restorative practices orientation to introduce them to restorative questions, peace circles, and language
- Offer trainings for students and families, including at parent-teacher association and community meetings
- Model RP conversations for students and families and encourage use of restorative language at home

**Benchmark 7: Take preventative measures to improve school climate:**
- Reach out to students to establish relationships on positive terms
- Find allies of restorative practices outside the building, including experts and community organizations that could partner with the school community in order to build restorative culture
Throughout The School Year

After the first month, the same three foci remain—training, relationship building, and data collection and analysis. During this time, it is critical to make sure that the implementation of restorative practices does not lose its momentum, as the responsibilities of the school year accumulate.

**Benchmark 1: Stand by the purpose of restorative practices:**
- Assess the school’s alignment with the purpose of restorative practices by soliciting feedback from students, educators, and families
- Use this feedback to inform changes to foundational structures or additional professional development

**Benchmark 2: Strengthen foundational structures for implementation:**
- Evaluate implementation with the Behavior Team at a midpoint meeting. Survey educators, families, and students to understand:
  - What areas of implementation are working well?
  - What areas of implementation need more support or need to be restructured?
  - Are we still aligned with our vision?
  - Do we need to change our vision?

**Benchmark 3: Collect and analyze data to inform next steps:**
- Review data from week to week in Behavior Team meetings and establish next steps
- Conduct a midyear school climate survey to assess progress towards goals
- Analyze discipline data to identify areas of concern

**Benchmark 4: Continue to train all educators:**
- Continue to offer professional development for educators, both optional and required
- Facilitate reflection on and evaluation of professional development

**Benchmark 5: Build restorative culture and language in the building:**
- Have a member of the Behavior Team always present at the door to greet students as they arrive, during lunch, and in the hallways to strengthen relationships and to identify rising concerns
- Work with staff and students to develop creative ways to promote restorative practices, like showcasing creative interventions and sharing a success story of the week
- Use a restorative lens for all meetings, perhaps beginning with peace circles or affective statements
- Share success stories about students and educators that have benefited from adopting this approach and changing their practices to keep energy around restorative practices alive
- Continue to discuss the impact of race and adult behavior impact on students

**Benchmark 6: Involve families and students in the shift to restorative practices:**
- Provide ongoing trainings with students during advisory, class meetings, or after school
- Regularly survey families and students for feedback
- Gather feedback through less formal avenues such as one-on-ones with students after they have participated in the restorative process or temperature checks with students that have been involved in conflict
- Regularly share qualitative and quantitative data with families and students

**Benchmark 7: Take preventative measures to improve school climate:**
- Support the RP Coordinator holding peace circles in classrooms in order to build relationships
- Ensure the RP Coordinator is building relationships with all students, not just those referred to the office
- Encourage teachers who have received training, to run their own peace circles in the classroom to establish a positive classroom environment
End of the School Year

It is important both to reflect on the first year of implementation and to look forward to how restorative practices can be strengthened the following year.

**Benchmark 1: Revisit the purpose of restorative practices:**
- Revisit the vision, revising if necessary, and assess adherence to the vision throughout the school year
- Provide an avenue for educators, students, and families to share successes and challenges

**Benchmark 2: Evaluate the foundational structures for implementation:**
- Reflect as a Behavior Team on the protocol of weekly meetings
- Revise any materials created—teacher manuals, behavior policies, referral forms
- Hire new staff based on the school’s vision to create a restorative culture

**Benchmark 3: Collect and analyze data to reflect and inform next steps:**
- Administer a final round of surveys to educators, students, and families
- Evaluate the progress made in reaching Year One data goals
- Set the goals for Year Two implementation
- Capture previously identified success stories to be used for the role play scenarios during professional development for the upcoming school year

**Benchmark 4: Review effectiveness of restorative practices trainings:**
- Document real stories of RP for the following year’s role-playing during training
- Modify trainings based on educator feedback for the following year
- Create manuals to support the staff training

**Benchmark 5: Celebrate restorative culture and language in the building:**
- Identify students, educators, and families that could serve as leaders and champions of restorative practices
- Create new signage for the school, particularly around specific RP success stories
- Celebrate students, educators, and families that truly embodied the restorative culture
- Recognize educators that were especially successful in acknowledging their own behavior’s impact on student behavior

**Benchmark 6: Have families and students evaluate the shift to restorative practices:**
- Administer a final round of surveys to students and families
- Review survey results with students and families and incorporate suggestions into school planning

**Benchmark 7: Take preventative measures to ensure a successful second year of implementation:**
- Identify students that will need early outreach the following school year
- Use the data from the current year to inform the development of preventative programming for subsequent school years
During the second year of implementation, as well as subsequent years, the foci should be:
1) Identifying which benchmarks from Year One have not been met and troubleshooting those areas.
2) Strengthening those benchmarks that were met or exceeded by the end of the first year.

In order to support these goals, this portion of the guide includes an “anti-model,” which will help identify areas of concern, and suggestions for expansion for each benchmark that has already been met or exceeded.

The Anti-Model

Often times, although steps toward a restorative cultural shift have been taken, the old, punitive culture is not entirely eliminated. Conflicting philosophies hinder the implementation of restorative practices and undermine its progress. Old habits - teachers requesting suspensions, students expecting punishments, distrust between educators and students - are not only frustrating, but serve as critical signs of problem areas in implementation.

This anti-model breaks down the signs that restorative practices have not been fully implemented by each benchmark. Use this tool to identify benchmarks that require troubleshooting. Once the area of concern has been identified, revisit the Year One Timeline for Implementation for guidance. Additional resources are available in the Elements of Sustainability: Common Challenges portion of the guide.

**Benchmark 1:** There is no common understanding of why restorative practices are being implemented.
- Educators cannot explain what restorative practices are
- Educators cannot explain why the school has chosen to implement RP, particularly the harmful impact of exclusionary practices on all students, but especially students of color and at-risk youth
- Educators are resistant to the core values of restorative practices: relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration

**Benchmark 2:** Foundational structures are missing or not being used in a way that supports restorative practices implementation.
- Minor behaviors, such as speaking out of turn in class, using a cell phone in class, or using profane language, are regularly being referred to the restorative process rather than being addressed in the classroom
- The school as a whole or individual classrooms are continuing to rely on a rigid consequence ladder that leads to students being sent out of the classroom and suspended for behaviors that can be addressed in a restorative manner
- Behavior Team meetings are not being held weekly, not being consistently attended by Behavior Team members, or are not happening at all
- Behavior Team meetings have developed into a time to complain, rather than a time to create action plans
- The RP Coordinator is given responsibilities for which they are not qualified
- The RP Coordinator is given responsibilities that are unrelated to building a restorative culture

**Benchmark 3:** The data being collected and analyzed does not show improvement.
- Expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions have not declined
- Racial disparities in these exclusionary discipline policies have not declined
- There is no system to support the consistent collection of data
**Benchmark 4: The training provided to educators is ineffective.**
- Training is lecture-based. There is no role-playing, story-telling, or real-time observation/coaching
- Teachers are not walking out of a training with strategies that can be put into place immediately in their classrooms
- The training does not appeal to teachers’ experience by acknowledging that many teachers may already be practicing this type of relational work in their classrooms
- Educators do not leave the training knowing who in the building, district, or community will be there to support them in this work when there are challenges
- In subsequent years of implementation, training is not differentiated by experience level or by type of learner
- The training is an event that happens in isolation, rather than on ongoing curriculum that builds on itself throughout the year

**Benchmark 5: The culture and language of the school remains punitive and reflects a fixed mindset.**
- Educators are not in the hallways to greet students during transitions
- Throughout the day, educators are not in the hallways having restorative conversations with students
- Students are called out for their behaviors in front of classmates
- The tone and voice levels used by educators reflect a punitive and shaming environment
- When educators discuss students, they use deficit language versus asset language
- Educators are unable to discuss the impact race has on decision making. They struggle specifically with acknowledging mistakes made around race, and committing to being a part of eradicating racial disparities in the building
- Student reputations from educators or other students are dictating how the student is treated in school
- Building titles and labels still reflect a punitive mindset. For example, students are sent to a “detention room” or “suspension room” instead of a “peace room” or “restorative office” when being referred to the restorative process
- The climate of the room to which students are sent from class is punitive rather than restorative. The person supervising the room, the activities they are allowed to do while in there, or the reason they have been sent do not support RP
- Students do not actively participate in restorative conversations, but rather wait for the inevitable punishment to be administered

**Benchmark 6: Families and students are unaware of the shift to restorative practices.**
- Families or students do not perceive a shift in the discipline policies as reflected in surveys and conversations
- Families or students are reluctant to participate in the restorative process when asked or are confused about its purpose after engaging in a restorative conversation

**Benchmark 7: Preventative measures are not being taken to improve school climate.**
- The Behavior Team never moves past reactionary work to developing preventative measures
- The RP Coordinator spends the majority of the time in the office rather than building relationships with students
- The RP Coordinator is given responsibilities that inhibit their ability to build relationships with educators and students. The RP Coordinator no longer has time to do preventative work
- Data from previous years is not being used to inform preventative work
Opportunities for Expansion

As benchmarks are met and exceeded, restorative practices can still be amplified. Expanding the areas in which a school is successful can generate excitement around restorative practices. Below are suggestions for expanding restorative practices in your school.

**Benchmark 1: There is a common understanding of why restorative practices are being implemented.**

**Better Marketing of RP:** In the initial year of implementation, it is most important to onboard educators to the new vision of a restorative building. In subsequent years however, more effort should be made to ensure that students, families, and visitors to the school understand the “why” behind restorative practices. Ideas to market restorative practices are:

- A sign in a prominent location, that all visitors might see, that announces “We Are Restorative”
- A section in the student handbook dedicated to restorative practices, explaining its purpose and providing students with useful tools like sentence stems
- A page on the school website that highlights restorative practices success stories
- A pamphlet available in the main office to explain restorative practices and the unique story of your school’s implementation

**Benchmark 2: Foundational structures to support RP implementation are in place.**

**Two-tiered Behavior Team:** Once foundational structures are in place and roles have been established, it may be possible for members of the administration to step away from Behavior Team meetings. It is, however, still incredibly important that the administration stay in constant communication with the Behavior Team. Some schools have had success with a two-tiered system in which:

- The Behavior Team continues to meet weekly to address concerns and develop next steps.
- The principal is only brought in for a quick debrief of the week and to address high-level concerns.

Continual assessment - Are people “staying in their lanes” (RP versus punitive discipline)? Is time being used effectively? How can things run more smoothly? Is the structure of the behavior team meetings being revisited - even though the structures are sound, regular reflection is necessary?

**Benchmark 3: A method of collecting and analyzing data is developed.**

**Collection of More In-Depth Restorative Data:** In the beginning years of implementation, data collection and analysis is often focused on exclusionary discipline practices, ensuring that the use of these practices are decreasing for all students and that disparities are decreasing for students of color and at-risk students. As data collection is streamlined, a Behavior Team can work to develop a more in-depth plan for documenting the restorative work that happens in the school.

You can find more information on this in the *Elements of Sustainability: Data Collection and Analysis* portion of this guide.

**Benchmark 4: Educators, both new and returning, are trained in restorative practices.**

**Training of All Educators:** All educators, meaning any adult in the building that interacts with students, can be trained in restorative practices. This could include cafeteria staff, athletic coaches, administrative support staff, maintenance staff, and transportation providers. Training sessions can be made available for community partners and anyone who may enter the building so that the language and culture of the school remains consistent for students. These trainings should continue to include role-playing, story-telling, and clear strategies that can be used by adults immediately in their interactions with students and other educators.

**Training in Strategies that Support Restorative Practices:** As educators return to the building each year, they will have a stronger understanding of the purpose of restorative practices. In order to keep returning educators engaged in training and to encourage the strengthening of school climate, train educators in strategies and philosophies that are supportive of restorative culture. See Appendix: Types of Professional Development for suggested areas in which to train educators.
Benchmark 5: Restorative language and culture have been established. 

Boosting Excitement around RP Culture: Once the restorative culture and language have been established, this culture should be celebrated so the excitement remains around restorative practices. Some creative ways to boost excitement around RP are:

- **Restorative Challenges**: Each month, challenge students to spread the restorative culture. In the first month of school, challenge students to high five people they do not know in the building. Encourage students to complete a certain number of random acts of kindness.

- **Caught in the Act**: Rather than “catching” students for behavior deemed inappropriate, acknowledge students who promote the school’s restorative culture. For example, if a student is seen using conflict-resolution skills independently, take note of the behavior and award the student a certificate or call home to share this positive behavior with their family.

- **Cultural Assemblies**: Coordinate a school-wide celebration of the diversity in the building, encouraging students to share traditions from their culture with students, educators, families, and members of the community.

- **National campaigns**: Participate in national campaigns, like Anti-bullying Month, Dignity In Schools Campaign National Week of Action, or National LGBTQ Pride Month, developing school-wide projects.

Benchmark 6: Families and students are well-informed of the shift to restorative practices.

**Family & Community Volunteers**: Invite family and community members to volunteer to support the restorative process. After being fully trained in RP, these volunteers could help with preventative initiatives or help lead peace circles and mediations in the building.

**Student Advocates**: Students who have shown to engage in the restorative process can serve as ambassadors to the rest of the student body, embodying the restorative mindset and advocating for the use of restorative practices.

**Peer Mediation**: Educators can nominate students to be peer mediators. Students can be trained in one of many existing peer mediation programs to address conflicts amongst peers.

Benchmark 7: Preventative measures, not just reactive measures, are being taken to improve school climate.

**Staff Community Building**: While funding for annual staff retreats might be hard to acquire, community building amongst all educators should happen throughout the school year. Staff potluck lunches are a great way to encourage educators to build relationships with one another. Be sure to always include non-teaching staff as a sign of the school’s inclusive culture.

Many restorative schools take advantage of summer months by planning optional staff team-building outings including hikes, bowling, and gatherings in local parks.

**Social Emotional Learning** is the personal and social competence to recognize one’s own and other people’s emotions, and to use that information to guide thinking and behavior. It affects how one manages behavior, navigates social complexities, and makes personal decisions that achieve positive results. It provides a flexible set of skills that can be acquired and improved with practice. It is essential in the restorative practices environment that educators and students engage in this work together to ensure meaningful adult-student relationships that are not dependent on academic performance. A plethora of these programs already exist and can be modified to be its own course that meets during the school day or in an after school program.
Overcoming Common Challenges to Implementation

There are many challenges that a school may encounter when implementing restorative practices initially and when trying to sustain a restorative culture years after implementation.

Many of these common challenges can be avoided by prioritizing:
• Articulating a clear vision to staff, students, and families; and emphasizing the purpose behind implementation and a commitment to the values of restorative practices;
• Hiring and honoring the role of a full-time Restorative Practices Coordinator who can build the relationships necessary for sustaining this culture shift and provide insight into the feelings of staff, students, and families towards implementation;
• Providing ongoing training for staff, students, and families in the values of restorative practices and essential strategies; observing staff to ensure trainings are effective; and revisiting these trainings both periodically and when uncertainties arise; and
• Debriefing frequently with staff, students, and families to reflect both on the outcomes of restorative practices implementation and on the processes used in the building.

This portion of the guide includes common challenges that may arise and methods that school leaders, RP Coordinators, and experts in the field have used to overcome them, including:
• Myths about restorative practices
• Loss of funding
• Changes in leadership
• Loss of belief
• Pushback from families
• Restorative practices become too mechanical
• Staff training is not implemented with fidelity
• Incomplete repair after conflict
• Restorative practices are too time-consuming
• Student-only focus
• Discipline disparities do not change

Keep the excitement alive around restorative practices. Any combination of the below challenges might lead to the school culture flat-lining. When the energy is lost, reboot restorative practices by bringing in outside resources and revisiting the original steps to implementation.
**Challenge:** Myths about Restorative Practices

**What It Might Look Like:**
Members of the school community believe the following myths can ultimately undermine any progress made by RP in changing school climate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MYTH</th>
<th>REALITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RP will eliminate “misbehavior” throughout the school.</td>
<td>RP, if implemented properly, will reduce discipline issues in the building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP will be successful with every student.</td>
<td>RP should be attempted with every student, but some students may require additional social-emotional or mental health supports. Victim-offender mediation is not recommended for bullying or sexual harassment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP will work immediately and every time.</td>
<td>RP are social skill building strategies that take time and practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP are only used to address student “misbehavior” and conflict.</td>
<td>RP should be used to address any conflict among students and educators in the building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP are too soft. There are no consequences, and no one is held accountable.</td>
<td>There are consequences, but those consequences are unique to each conflict and may not always be publicly known. In a restorative mediation, both parties are held accountable for their actions. This accountability however, is not defined by a punishment, but rather by taking responsibility for actions and working together to repair the harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP are just the RP Coordinator's responsibility.</td>
<td>Creating and sustaining a restorative culture requires active participation from all educators in the building.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How to Address It:**
- Be clear about the expectations of RP from the beginning - do not promise a fix to all school problems, but instead explain the purpose and realities of restorative practices.
- Ensure a space for educators to voice concerns to an expert in RP who can be part of the process to dispel myths by countering with realities.
- Provide training “booster sessions” periodically, but especially when the goals of RP become unclear.
- Be transparent about the ladder of interventions used for students when they are referred to a restorative process. At the conclusion of a mediation, be sure any involved parties are aware of the repair pieces being completed.
**Challenge: Loss of Funding**

**What It Might Look Like:**
A loss of funding that impacts the implementation of restorative practices might be specific to RP - losing the funding for the RP Coordinator or budget cuts that impact school climate - larger class sizes, cutback on mental health supports, etc. In either case, there is a loss of capacity to build relationships within the school community.

**How to Address It:**
- Having a strong philosophical commitment to restorative practices might avoid the need to cut the RP Coordinator’s position.
- Be transparent in the discussions of the budget with staff members, valuing suggestions on where cuts might be made that would lessen the impact on school climate.
- Be open to people taking pay cuts in order to keep support staff.
- In the case of the loss of funding for a RP Coordinator, many schools have had success reassigning a person within the building to that role. However, it is imperative that the school commits to this person being a full-time RP Coordinator, taking on the responsibilities outlined in the Year 1 Implementation portion of this guide. These responsibilities might also be divided among two school representatives, as long as someone is always available to mediate a conflict.
- Take advantage of teacher leaders or train volunteers from the community to be able to take on this role.
- Allocate social-emotional funds to hiring the RP Coordinator.
- Pursue grants to fund the RP Coordinator. Title I funds can be used for restorative practices. Additionally, many grants exist within the justice community that can be used to fund restorative practices in schools.

**Challenge: Changes in Leadership**

**What It Might Look Like:**
Changes in leadership at the district level (school board, superintendent) or at the school level (principal, administration) can be a challenge, particularly if the new leaders are not restorative-minded.

**How to Address It:**
- If one individual leaving halts the program, this is most likely a sign that a larger shift in school climate never occurred. Be sure to be taking time throughout implementation to listen to and address concerns from students, staff, and the community.
- Identify plans for succession early on, building capacity amongst teacher leaders.
- Have easily accessible data analysis on hand to show short-term (year to year) and long-term (since implementation) improvements to prove RP’s effectiveness.
- When families, educators, and students are highly trained, they can serve as advocates of RP should there be a change in leadership. Identify and empower these leaders early on in the implementation process.
- Find and sustain allies throughout all levels of the school district. Involve school board members and district employees early on to build advocates at the district level.
- Identify and partner with other supportive organizations like teachers’ unions or community organizations that will advocate for restorative practices should they be threatened.
**Challenge: Loss of Belief**

**What It Might Look Like:**
While a loss of belief in the restorative process can take many forms, the sentiment among educators is typically the same: “We tried and it doesn’t work.” When effective educators are no longer fully engaging in these processes, it is imperative to identify what derailed their support of the philosophy. Some possibilities are:

- Effective educators have concerns about a specific conflict that was mediated using restorative practices or in regards to implementation of restorative practices as a whole. With no place to voice concerns to the Behavior Team, this sentiment spreads amongst other educators.
- The person assigned as the RP Coordinator has failed to build trusting relationships with both staff and students.
- A short term increase in suspension or expulsion numbers, or even an individual incident, leads to a loss of belief among the school community.

**How to Address It:**
- Remember that you may not always be able to secure 100% buy-in for restorative practices, particularly from staff. Rather than focus on changing the minds of every staff member, prioritize building the leadership of the most committed staff, winning over support in the “middle,” and convincing those that are against RP to stop actively resisting it. Then, continue to build a staff that supports RP by interviewing with a relational and restorative mindset.
- Do not give staff the license to say, “I don’t believe in RP.” Use data to show its effectiveness within your school. Use national, state, district, or building level data to show the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline policies and the racial disproportionality in their use. Point to the larger impact of the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Ensure teachers have multiple avenues to voice concerns, but counter by using the classrooms of teachers who have fully committed to being restorative as models. Encourage peer observations and ask teachers to reflect on whether those restorative-minded staff members are experiencing the same difficulties.
- Include students in the discussion as this work must be driven by them. Students carry the torch for RP in a building because it gives them a voice they have often been denied.

**Challenge: Pushback from Families**

**What It Might Look Like:**
Families call for more punishments because:

- They believe being punitive is more effective for their own student; or
- Their student was a “victim” and they are looking for justice.

**How to Address It:**
- Ensure family members have multiple avenues to express concerns to experts in restorative practices.
- Provide trainings for families, emphasizing the following:
  - There are consequences for student actions, but they are different to every situation and are generally not exclusionary.
  - Your child will be safe at school.
  - Exclusionary discipline will not help your student or any other student learn the skills to cope with conflict.
- Include families in the RP mediation process so they can see that people can still be held accountable for their actions without traditional punishment.
- Train family members who can explain the benefits of RP to other family members as peers.
**Challenge: Restorative Practices Become Too Mechanical**

**What It Might Look Like:**
When restorative practices become too programmed in the building, it is sometimes reflective of poor training or a school that did not fully commit to becoming restorative. This problem may manifest itself in the following ways:

- Students, and even staff, begin to see an RP mediation as a punishment. This is especially likely if RP mediations are often grouped together with a suspension.
- Students and staff use the language and go through the motions, but restorative mindset is not reflected in the school climate.
- Students and staff just apologize after an incident, with no repair piece or restoration to the community.

**How to Address It:**
- Revisit the vision with the school community.
- Ensure a balance between proactive and reactive restorative practices, making sure that relationship building is still a priority.
- Make clear to students and staff that they will always be held accountable.
- If an educator is reaching the same solution at the conclusion of every RP conversation, restorative practices are not being used effectively. The flexibility of the consequence, that it can be unique to every student and every conflict, is the essence of restorative practices.
- Ensure that the RP Coordinator is someone passionate about the restorative process so that the conversations they have and the relationships they build are clearly authentic.

**Challenge: Staff Training is Not Implemented with Fidelity**

**What It Might Look Like:**
In the years following initial implementation of restorative practices, it is critical to review staff trainings to be sure they are being implemented with fidelity. Some common problems that may arise are:

- After years of implementation, staff is assumed to be trained in RP. Trainings become less frequent and less intensive.
- RP training is not a priority when onboarding new staff.
- Other initiatives are not in line with the restorative mindset, leading to staff being trained in conflicting philosophies.
- Staff does not actively participate. Role-playing is not a part of the training or not taken seriously.
- The Behavior Team feels powerless in addressing concerns with implementation.

**How to Address It:**
- RP training needs to be a priority for new and returning staff each year. Capitalize on the expertise of returning staff, but do not dismiss them from the training.
- The Behavior Team should use a restorative lens when considering any new initiative to be implemented in the building. While many initiatives might support restorative work, some may undermine it entirely.
- Call on an expert. If your current school district cannot provide an expert, there are districts and organizations throughout the country that can provide training to realign the school community with the values and essential strategies of restorative practices.
- Collect real stories from students and educators each year to use in future trainings for role playing and as testimonials of the impact of different strategies.
- Check-in regularly with the Behavior Team to make sure they feel confident and safe addressing concerns with other educators in the building around the use of restorative practices. Be clear with all educators that this is a school-wide expectation and that the Behavior Team will be there to support them.
Challenge: Incomplete Repair
What It Might Look Like:
In order for the restorative process to work effectively and for those involved to be held accountable for their actions, it is imperative that the harm done is repaired. When this piece is left incomplete, not only might those directly impacted by the harm feel failed by the restorative process, but it also can contribute to the myth that restorative practices do not hold students accountable for their actions.

Most often, repair is left incomplete because there is no follow-up to make sure that the relationship was restored. However, sometimes someone who was harmed may feel that their voice was not heard during the mediation and the repair “wasn’t enough.”

How to Address It:
• End RP mediations by scheduling a time, preferably within one day, to check in about the completion of the repair piece.
• Create a tracker so that others can support with check-ins, being sure to determine both if the repair was completed and the relationship restored.
• Continue less formal temperature checks with those involved in particularly heated situations for an extended period of time.

Challenge: Restorative Practices are too Time-Consuming
What It Might Look Like:
Restorative practices are more time-consuming than exclusionary methods of discipline. While a suspension may call for paperwork or a phone call home, these exclusionary practices are still not as time-consuming as teaching students conflict-resolution and social-emotional skills. Frequently, educators feel as though they do not have enough time to dedicate to restorative practices. Some examples might be:
• At the classroom level, teachers are not dedicating time to have necessary one-on-one restorative conversations for reasons such as pacing of a lesson, pressure from administration and evaluators, or pushes to increase test scores.
• Educators do not give students the time they need to master the new conflict-resolution skills that restorative practices teach. They do not dedicate time to teaching the skill and are discouraged when results are not immediate.

How to Address It:
At the classroom level, there are numerous strategies teachers can use so that they can address student behavior in a restorative way without disrupting a lesson:
• Avoid addressing the behavior of the student in a way that draws the attention of other students; this can escalate the situation quickly for many students.
• Quietly address the behavior with the student if it requires immediate attention or use a nonverbal redirect.
• Wait until students are doing independent, partner, or group work to be able to have the restorative conversation with the student.
• Have the restorative conversation with the student after class.

These changes in classroom and school climate will ultimately lead to more academic time in each class. If building positive relationships with students and teaching those relational skills is prioritized on the front end, classroom time will not be monopolized by correcting behavior.

The skills taught through restorative practices should be treated like math skills in that students need to be taught the steps, have space to practices, and be assessed on their readiness. Some students will master these skills faster than others; some will need to be retaught the steps multiple times before mastery. Remind educators that they will get the time spent teaching these skills back and more as the school climate improves.
**Challenge: Student-Only Focus**

**What It Might Look Like:**
Sometimes, RP becomes limited to student behavior and associated only with situations where students have made a mistake.

Once restorative practices have been implemented, the expectation should be that all conflicts that are appropriate for the restorative process are handled that way, no matter who from the school community is involved. It is important to make sure that educators and students are both held equally accountable for their actions, and each is given equal voice.

In response to student/educator conflicts, it is imperative that there is recognition of adult responsibility for or escalation of student behavior. Without this acknowledgement of shared responsibility, restorative practices will be viewed as another form of punishment. Students will not be willing to recognize their own accountability if adults involved cannot do the same. Ultimately, students might become disillusioned towards restorative practices and possibly lose respect for both the educators and the process.

Conflicts among staff can also be addressed using restorative practices. Not only will this serve as a reminder to adults that this process is not just for students, but will also promote the understanding that staff relationships can and do impact students and school climate as a whole. This does not always need to be in response to a specific incident, but also can be used to address behavior, perception, or misperception among adults in the building.

**How to Address It:**
The use of restorative practices should begin before students enter the building for the school year. Set the restorative tone and the expectation for adult participation by using peace circles during staff development. Administrators and members of the Behavior Team should model affective statements and the restorative questions with adults both during planning weeks and throughout the academic year. Administrators should also be sure to request the restorative process for conflicts that involve them to reinforce this expectation.

Beginning the first day of implementation and continuing at all future trainings and meetings around restorative practices, be clear that all conflicts, including those with adults, will be addressed restoratively and that harm can be caused by any party.

**Challenge: Disparities in Discipline Do Not Change**

**What It Might Look Like:**
Despite overall decreases in suspensions and expulsions, students of color, LGBTQ and gender nonconforming students, or students enrolled in special education are still more likely than their peers to be disciplined using exclusionary practices.

**How to Address It:**
First and foremost, educators must be able to talk about disparities in discipline data. If educators are unable to name the problem or have conversations about race, racism, and other prejudices, the disparities in data will persist. In order to create an environment in which these difficult conversations can happen, administrators or members of the Behavior Team should:

- Create a safe environment in which both educators and students feel comfortable sharing.

- Provide training in implicit and explicit bias for all educators in the building.

- Survey students and families - specifically asking for experiences revolving around race, gender, sexuality, or disability – and share that information with educators and administrators in the building.

- Identify resources that are available within your district or from community organizations to assist in facilitating these conversations.

Having conversations around cultural competency can be one of the first of many steps in addressing disparities in discipline data and will help determine next steps for the building.
Importance of Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

When implementing restorative practices on a large scale, whether that means in one school or throughout a school district, involving multiple stakeholders can amplify the success of such an undertaking. There are numerous forces impacting the culture and climate of the nation’s schools, and having allies within each of the forces can prove imperative to sustaining a restorative mindset.

Collaboration with stakeholders and community starts with an invitation. Initially, securing allies in external organizations is important. While a deeper partnership will certainly take time to build, the goal is genuine collaboration, in which partners meet consistently to expand the restorative work, participate in the process, and reflect on what is being done within schools and the larger community.

The School District.

How to Connect: There are numerous people within a district with whom a partnership would be beneficial. Ultimately, more allies within the school district can translate to more people advocating for funding and support for restorative practices implementation in individual schools and the school district as a whole. Some key people to reach out to are:

- The superintendent;
- Members of the school board;
- District employees or partners responsible for professional development;
- Students services departments or wherever mental health and social-emotional supports are centralized; and
- Offices responsible for discipline, particularly suspensions, expulsions, and transfers.

Maintain an active presence at school district events, including school board meetings and district professional development opportunities, to ensure support for restorative practices. Invite school district leadership to trainings and events that highlight the building’s restorative culture.

Value of this Partnership: Allying with the school district is not only powerful in the support it can provide to individual schools, but it has the potential to spread restorative practices throughout the district. By developing relationships with the superintendent and school board, an administrator could secure funding for restorative practices in addition to creating an advocate within the district to defend this work. By finding allies in the student services department, a school might be able to identify additional mental health and social-emotional supports that can assist students that have needs that cannot be addressed through restorative practices alone. Partnering with the office responsible for professional development could lead to district support in training. Denver Public Schools, for example, employs a RP Coordinator at the district level responsible for training and supporting district employees at any school within the school district. School districts may offer other trainings and professional development that could support RP implementation.

The ultimate goal in a partnership with the district is a change in the district’s discipline policy to reflect a restorative mindset. In Denver, for example, Denver Public Schools changed its discipline policy to include restorative practices after a successful pilot program.
Students and Families.

*How to Connect:* Present restorative practices, including offering in-depth trainings, to already existing parent and family organizations like parent teacher organizations. Invite trained family members to volunteer in classrooms and in the restorative office/peace room. Host data review nights with families to show progress and field questions and comments.

Include student organizations, especially those tied to populations most affected by disparities and the school-to-prison pipeline [organizations that serve students of color, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), etc.]. Connect with previously established student leadership groups like student government, and include a diverse group of representatives from the student body in discussions around school culture and discipline. Introduce students to restorative practices and train students to facilitate restorative circles.

*Value of this Partnership:* Restorative culture is inclusive of all members of the school community. By not only involving students and families, but also providing them with the opportunity to play a strong role in implementation, a school can strengthen its restorative culture. Additionally, a well-informed community of students and families can hold educators accountable for sticking with restorative practices, especially in the event of leadership and staff turnover. Having their voices heard, often for the first time, students can be the driving force of restorative work and should be included in discussions around data, school climate, and next steps as they are the group most impacted.

Educator Unions.

*How to Connect:* Reach out to local representation for support in this initiative. Building representatives can be very influential in onboarding educators. Union employees responsible for organizing within individual schools can communicate the vision of restorative practices with union leadership and its network of educators.

*Value of this Partnership:* Staff buy-in is imperative to successful implementation of restorative practices. Involving teachers’ unions can be a key strategy to onboard educators. The building representative for example, might be able to encourage educators to engage in the process by using a restorative approach to address grievances. As evident by our partnership in Denver, the teachers’ union has the power to identify key teacher leaders who can advocate for a restorative mindset.

In Denver, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association provides training in classroom management strategies that support restorative practices. Additionally, they conduct school climate and discipline surveys in schools experiencing problems, even specifically surveying faculty on racial disparities.

“By finding allies in the student services department, a school might be able to identify additional mental health and social-emotional supports that can assist students that have needs that cannot be addressed through restorative practices alone.”
Community Advocacy Organizations.

How to Connect: Find allies in community organizations, particularly those with whom families and students of the school are involved. Identify grassroots organizations that advocate for equality and racial justice in education and build the voice of the community. Connect with organizations that advocate for, intervene with, and support youth such as mental health centers, special education advocacy groups, Boys and Girls Clubs, and human services allies. Organizations that work with students and families under court-mandate can also serve as important allies.

Value of this Partnership: Restorative practices are, at their core, based on respect and relationships. However, families and members of the community served by schools are often excluded from conversations. By organizing, educating, and empowering students and families, community organizations strengthen their voices so that their opinions and needs can be respected and heard. This partnership is particularly beneficial to sustainability, as a well-informed and trained community can provide support when the inevitable pushback occurs. A community organization can also hold educators and district officials accountable to being restorative as staff and leadership within a school or district change. These organizations can also be key bridge builders and problem solvers. Students and families might be more likely to trust these organizations, so community organizations can be particularly useful in assessing school culture, proposing solutions, and supporting implementation.

Law Enforcement and the Courts.

How to Connect: An alliance with the criminal justice system at every level is beneficial in the effort to stop the school-to-prison pipeline. Key allies could include:
- School police officer(s)
- Municipal police departments
- Local prosecutors
- Public Defender’s Offices, or a similar offices representing juveniles
- Local judges

Even just one ally in each of these categories could provide critical insight into the work of restorative practices.
Local Universities.

How to connect: There are numerous ways to forge a partnership with higher education. For example, individual professor allies can make your school’s transformation story a part of a course curriculum, guaranteeing an opportunity to present to a group of students each time it is offered. Some disciplines in which to seek out allies are:

- Law
- Social Work
- Education
- Criminal Psychology/Justice
- Ethnic Studies

Additionally, look to partner with student activist groups on campus that may be interested in volunteering, conducting research, analyzing data, or documenting the work at your school.

Value of this Partnership: Generally speaking, working in universities is a way to identify allies in this work. Depending on their field of study, the contributions of students and professors will vary. Working with professors in the education department, for example, can encourage the teaching of restorative practices and classroom management strategies that support RP to future educators. Partnering with a communications class could lead to the development of videos and materials that highlight your school’s work. Reaching out to a student activist group could empower students at your own school. Keep in mind that students in any course may be looking for a field in which to intern or conduct research, often times at no cost to you.

“By organizing, educating, and empowering students and families, community organizations strengthen their voices so that their opinions and needs can be respected and heard.”
Data Collection and Analysis

The Value of Data Collection
While educators can be fearful of data, particularly the extremely specific discipline data that informs restorative practices, it is important to remember how powerful and illuminating this data can be. During the implementation process, it is critical for the Behavior Team to be clear on the purpose of collecting this data: it is not the enemy but rather a support for this difficult work.

A strong system of data collection has the potential to expand the impact restorative practices can have on a building. Data can identify areas of concern and inform necessary targeted trainings for educators, students, and families. It can be used to partner educators that are excelling with those that are experiencing difficulties with implementation. By identifying when discipline is being used disproportionately towards marginalized students, data has the power to be an instrument for racial and social justice and a tool for ending the school-to-prison pipeline. In order to sustain change, data analysis can be used to show that district funds are being used effectively and to fundraise outside of the district.

Perhaps most important is using the data to set informed goals for the school community. Baseline data, for example, can inform goals. Once goals have been established, data can then inform progress. Consistently sharing data with educators and being transparent around its role in improving school culture will serve as motivation for educators to enter accurate and complete data.

Framework for Data Collection
There are two categories of data that must be established when implementing restorative practices: punitive discipline data and restorative practices data.

- Punitive discipline data, such as the rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement, is necessary to show a reduction in exclusionary discipline practices and racial disparities.

- Restorative practices data, such as who is referring students and for what behavior, can show how restorative practices is being used within the building.

Both types of data are critical to troubleshooting areas of concern, celebrating successes, and securing funding.
**Problem-Solving and Goal Setting**

While the data of an individual building will drive much more in-depth conversation, the Behavior Team should be sure to address the following questions when analyzing the data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUNITIVE DISCIPLINE DATA ANALYSIS</th>
<th>RESTORATIVE PRACTICES DATA ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is being suspended, expelled, and/or referred to law enforcement?</td>
<td>Who is being referred to the restorative process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are these students being suspended, expelled, and/or referred to law enforcement?</td>
<td>Why are these students being referred to the restorative process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is not being suspended, expelled or referred to law enforcement? Why?</td>
<td>Who is not being referred to the restorative process? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After thorough data analysis, Behavior Team meetings should serve as strategy sessions, speaking to the following questions:

- What is working? Whose interests are being served? Whose needs are being met?
- What is not working? Whose interests are being ignored? Whose needs are not being met?
- Where should we focus our attention in the immediate future in order to affect the most change? How do we ensure more groups’ interests are served and needs are met?

These reflective and critical conversations should focus just as much on adult behavior as they do on student behavior considering that adult interactions with students can often escalate student behavior.

Once an area of focus, whether short term or long term, has been established, the Behavior Team should craft measurable goals and share with staff. These goals should be both informed and measured by the data.
Punitive Discipline Data to be Collected:
Perhaps the most important data to look at will be the numbers of suspensions (in and out of school), expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement as this data can both prove the success of restorative practices in reducing exclusionary discipline practices and identifying areas for improvement. While the data you are able to collect may depend on your school’s data collection system, a school would ideally have disaggregated data that breaks down suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement in the following ways:
- By race
- By gender
- By educator who refers the student
- By offense
- By special education status
- By ELL status
- By grade level
- By location
- By time of day
- By date

While collecting and analyzing data broken down at this level certainly takes time, it could lead to meaningful discussion and action around disproportionality and root causes. If all of this data is not available, particularly when setting baselines, work with the data that is available while working to increase your access. Reach out to the school district, other schools in the area, or technical support from any data collection systems the school uses in order to expand data collection abilities.

As the Behavior Team reviews data, they should be identifying patterns in the data that could be used to inform necessary interventions. For example, a school might learn that they are suspending African-American males at a much higher rate than their white counterparts. The Behavior Team could then look to the offenses for which these students are most likely to be suspended. If the offense is “insubordination” for example, the Behavior Team could develop trainings on cultural competency and equity to raise staff awareness and correct this issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA COLLECTED</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Total number of in-school suspensions (ISS), out-of-school suspensions (OSS), expulsions (EXP), and referrals to law enforcement (RTL) | To track reductions in the use of exclusionary discipline practices after implementation of RP  
To identify areas of concern as RP are implemented (for example, as OSS decreases, are ISS increasing?) |
| Length of ISS or OSS                                              | To determine if the length of ISS and OSS are being reduced as culture becomes more restorative |
| ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL disaggregated by                           | To track disparities for marginalized students in school discipline as RP is implemented  
To inform necessary trainings in cultural competence, diversity, and implicit/explicit bias |
| Race                                                              |                                                                         |
| Gender                                                            |                                                                         |
| Special education status                                           |                                                                         |
| ELL status                                                        |                                                                         |
| ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL disaggregated by grade level               | To determine which grade levels need additional supports/proactive skill-building  
To identify which grade levels are having more success and work to determine why that might be: Stronger teacher buy-in for that age group? Less exposure to the previous punitive culture? |
| ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL disaggregated by educator who assigned it   | To identify which educators need additional supports in RP implementation and which are succeeding in keeping students in the classroom |
| ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL disaggregated by offense                    | To identify root cause of behavior  
To identify behaviors that could be addressed restoratively that are not  
To identify areas where additional training is needed for educators |
| Location of ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL                                | To determine which teachers and educators are referring students in order to support those struggling with restorative practices  
To determine what areas of the building could benefit from additional educator presence  
To determine in which environments students and educators are most struggling to use the conflict-resolution and social-emotional skills they are learning in order to inform proactive lessons in skill-building |
| Time of day of ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL                            | To determine when students and educators are experiencing conflict in order to inform schedule changes and proactive lessons in skill-building |
| Date of ISS, OSS, EXP, and RTL                                    | To determine times of the school year in which students and educators are more likely to experience conflict in order to inform timing/frequency of trainings and additional supports |
| Percentage of students impacted by ISS, OSS, EXP and RTL          | To determine what percentage of students are being impacted by ISS, OSS, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement to determine where interventions are needed to reduce the impact of exclusionary discipline practices  
Can be further disaggregated to determine the percentage of ELL students, special education students, students of color, etc. who are being impacted |
Restorative Practices Data to be Collected
When collecting data on restorative practices, it is important to survey students, families, and educators on school climate and the effectiveness of the restorative processes in order to gauge the success of implementation and to identify areas of concern. In addition to the items listed in the following chart, demographic breakdowns (by race, gender, ELL status, SPED status) of students referred to the restorative process can continue to be beneficial in identifying a need for cultural competency and implicit bias trainings and areas where additional supports are needed.

While many schools may already have data collection systems in place to collect punitive data, a system to collect restorative data will most likely need to be created. Try reaching out to technology supports to see if “restorative practices” can be added to the list of interventions in the data collection system of your school or district. If this is not an option, a simple referral form can be used to track this data.

As the school culture shifts, it may seem difficult to collect data around restorative practices. Affective statements and restorative conversations for example, will become second nature and will not always be documented formally. While there certainly are difficulties in data collection as the restorative work becomes engrained in school culture, the Behavior Team should still work towards collecting the data listed in the chart on page 35.

When building this system of collecting data, there are often resources available for support. Take advantage of and build upon surveys already administered by the district or union, selecting survey items that speak to school culture and cultural competency. Look into national resources, resources from local, and partner with local universities, particularly with students that may be able to assist with developing a research model.

Challenges Around Data Collection
Even schools that have demonstrated a strong commitment to restorative practices experience issues around the time required for entering and gathering data. Often times, the time it takes to enter data is time that could be spent engaging with students, families, and other educators. While this is a challenge that will persist even years into implementation, it is important to remember that neither data collection nor building relationships should be compromised. Work with staff to develop a data collection system that helps educators balance doing the work with documenting the work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DATA COLLECTED</strong></th>
<th><strong>PURPOSE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Survey educators on school climate at regular intervals (at least three times per year) | To determine if and in what ways school climate has improved for educators  
To identify areas in which more support or training is necessary  
To identify how many educators are consistently using restorative practices  
To understand what might be contributing to educator turnover and retention |
| Survey families on school climate at regular intervals (at least three times per year) | To determine if and in what ways school climate has improved for families  
To identify areas in which more support, communication, or training is necessary  
To understand what can improve family engagement  
To understand ways to improve student/family retention |
| Survey students on school climate at regular intervals (at least three times per year) | To determine if and in what ways school climate has improved for students  
To identify areas in which more support or training is necessary  
To understand ways to improve student engagement  
To understand ways to improve student retention |
| Total percentage of students being referred to the restorative process | To determine what percentage of students are given additional supports in developing conflict-resolution and social-emotional skills in order to determine where additional proactive skill-building might be needed |
| Total percentage of educators participating in the restorative process | To determine what percentage of educators are providing and provided with additional supports in developing conflict-resolution and social-emotional skills in order to determine where additional proactive skill-building might be needed |
| Behavior for which students and educators are referred to restorative process | To ensure the behaviors being referred to the RP Coordinator are not behaviors that could be resolved within the classroom  
To identify proactive measures that can be taken to reduce the number of referrals to the restorative process |
| Source of referral to restorative process:  
1) Self  
2) Educator  
3) Parent  
4) Peer  
For both students and educators | To measure student and educator understanding of the purpose of restorative practices in order to inform future trainings for students and staff  
Self and peer referrals can be a strong indicator of successful understanding of the vision |
| Feedback survey for those who participate in restorative process | To determine if participants are satisfied with the results of the restorative process  
To inform adjustments to be made to the restorative process |
When implementing restorative practices, there are numerous ways to train educators in the philosophy and the strategies that support it. In addition to trainings specific to RP, train staff in philosophies and strategies that are supportive of a restorative culture.

**Professional Development Specific to Restorative Practices:**

*Launching Restorative Practices:* When introducing restorative practices to staff, families, and students for the first time, be sure to allocate six to eight hours to the following:

- The history of restorative practices
- How exclusionary practices are harmful to the school community
- Why it is important to implement at this school, supported by both qualitative and quantitative data
- An overview of restorative strategies that can be used in the classroom
- Role-playing of the strategies

**Modeling Key Strategies for Classroom RP:** For educators that struggle to implement restorative practices in the classroom, visit the classroom and model the practice for them with their students. For example, if a teacher is facilitating peace circles but does not feel as though relationships have been strengthened, model a peace circle with the students they teach. Be sure to debrief afterwards to address any questions or concerns.

**Observation and Coaching Cycles:** The RP Coordinator or member of the Behavior Team can conduct non-evaluative observations of teachers and schedule one-on-one coaching sessions.

**Targeted Professional Development:** Use feedback from educators, students, and families or data from observations (e.g., 18 out of 33 teachers have been seen using affective statements) to inform upcoming professional development. Booster sessions differentiated by area of concern might be offered, with educators self-selecting or being assigned a session to attend.

**Integrating RP and Curriculum:** Facilitate sessions with teachers, possibly by content or grade-level, to brainstorm ways course curriculum might incorporate restorative practices. For example, an English teacher might use a peace circle to facilitate discussion around a selection of poetry.

“When implementing restorative practices, there are numerous ways to train educators in the philosophy and the strategies that support it.”
Professional Development Supportive of Restorative Practices:

*Cultural Competency, Implicit Bias, or Explicit Bias:*
Exclusionary discipline practices impact students of color and other marginalized groups far more than their peers. Training staff in cultural competency and implicit/explicit biases can help reduce disparities and encourage meaningful conversations around race. Without this training, there is a tendency for RP to benefit white students more than students of color.

*De-Escalation Training:* When conflicts do arise in the building, be sure educators are trained to deescalate the situation through both verbal communication and body language.

*Trauma-Informed Education:* Be sure educators are trained to recognize and respond to the effects of trauma on students.

*Motivational Interviewing:* By training educators in this dialogue, you empower them to teach their peers and students to be accountable for their actions and change their behavior without confronting or punishing them.

*Relationship Building, Social-Emotional Skills:* Train educators to incorporate social emotional skill-building into their curriculum. If flexibility allows, consider allocating part of the daily or weekly schedule to an advisement program, providing appropriate training to support educators in this endeavor.

*Home-Visit Training:* Train all educators to visit the homes of students and families, providing the necessary tools to facilitate conversations in the home and a standard protocol, so that families and school staff can build stronger relationships.
Included in this portion of the guide are additional tools that can be used to support school-wide implementation of restorative practices. These tools should not be seen as restrictive, but rather as supports as your building develops a structure and procedure for the restorative process. Modify them according to the building’s needs.

The tools included are:
1) Scenarios for Role-Playing
2) Interview Questions when Hiring for a Restorative Mindset
3) Punitive Versus Restorative Discipline
4) Refocus Form (online)
5) Agreement to Mediate (online)
6) Final Restorative Agreement (online)
7) Participant Questionnaire (online)
8) Formula for Calculating Disparities (online)

Sample Scenarios for Role-Playing

The following scenarios can be used to show educators, families, and students how to hold a restorative conversation. Encourage participants to use the restorative questions, or questions of a similar sentiment, to guide the conversation:

1) What’s happening?
2) Who is this affecting and how?
3) What part can you take responsibility for?
4) What can you do to make things right?

Remember to save the stories of students and educators throughout the school year to create scenarios that are reflective of the behavior in your building.

Scenario 1: You have asked Emilio to get to work several times and he continues to not do anything. This is out of character for Emilio. You ask him to step in the hallway with you for a quick restorative dialogue. (Note: The teacher does not know that Emilio is under a lot of stress at home. He may or may not share this information during the conversation.)

Scenario 2: You are in the third week of school and, when entering grades, notice that Maria has not turned in any work since the beginning of the school year. She is engaged and positive in class and demonstrates she understands the material when answering questions in class.

Scenario 3: Jessica is supposed to be working on a project with a group of classmates. You find Jessica away from her group applying lip gloss and talking with her friends. You ask her to return to her group to contribute to the project. A few minutes later, Jessica is turned away from her group again. You tell Jessica she needs to stay after class to discuss her behavior. She rolls her eyes, but agrees to stay.

She returns to her group. However, once more before class is over, you find her at a table away from her group talking to a friend.
Scenario 4: Joseph and Aaron are continuously disruptive during your delivery of instructions at the beginning of class. Despite multiple redirects, their conversation and laughter continue to interrupt the instruction. You ask the boys to stay after class so you can check in with them.

You continue with your instruction once again as laughter breaks out from Joseph, Aaron, and the students in their vicinity. You ask them to complete a Refocus form (form with the restorative questions) while you finish providing instruction.

After the rest of the class has started the assignment, you pull Joseph and Aaron in the hallway and review their Refocus forms. In response to the question around repairing the situation, both boys have written “I won’t do it again.”
Interview Questions when Hiring for a Restorative Mindset

As new staff members are on-boarded, it will be important to ensure that staff who believe in this model are selected for new or open positions. Ensuring this can begin in the interview process by asking about candidates’ approaches to relationship-building, resolving conflicts, and addressing rule-breaking behavior. This can help you identify whether their beliefs and approaches align with restorative practices. You may also want to ask the candidate what they understand about restorative practices in the academic setting. If a candidate doesn’t have an understanding of the approaches, the interviewing committee can spend some time explaining the philosophy and what will be expected with regard to restorative practices from a staff perspective.

1) The phone is ringing, a student has just entered the classroom upset and states that he needs you, and a teacher just emailed requesting your immediate help. What are your steps in ensuring everyone’s needs are met?

2) Why is it important to build relationships with students, staff, and families?

3) What have you found to be the best way to build relationships with young people? Your colleagues?

4) If a student is out of dress code, how would you handle it? What is the student walks away from you?

5) What are the first three things you do if a student is being disruptive or noncompliant?

6) How would you handle a belligerent student, cursing at you or another staff member?

7) What happens if you are focused on a project or deadline and an urgent situation derails you?

8) What are ways you can support making connections between the school/classroom and the students’ homes?

9) Role play: Give the candidate a scenario (ideally a common scenario experienced in your building) and ask them to facilitate a conversation between two of the interviewers.
### PUNITIVE VS. RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PUNITIVE</strong></th>
<th><strong>RESTORATIVE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Misbehavior” defined as breaking school rules or letting school down.</td>
<td>“Misbehavior” defined as harm (emotional/mental/physical) done to one person/group by another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus is on what happened and establishing blame or guilt.</td>
<td>Focus on problem-solving by expressing feelings and needs and exploring how to address problems in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversarial relationship and process. Includes an authority figure with power to decide on penalty, in conflict with wrongdoer.</td>
<td>Dialogue and negotiation with everyone involved in communication and cooperation with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposition of pain or unpleasantness to punish and deter/prevent.</td>
<td>Restitution as a means of restoring both parties, the goal being reconciliation and acknowledging responsibility for choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to rules and adherence to due process.</td>
<td>Attention to relationships and achievement of a mutually desired outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict/wrongdoing represented as impersonal and abstract; individual versus school.</td>
<td>Conflict/wrongdoing recognized as interpersonal conflicts with opportunity for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One social injury compounded by another.</td>
<td>Focus on repair of social injury/damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School community as spectators, represented by member of staff dealing with situation; those directly affected uninvolved and powerless.</td>
<td>School community involved in facilitating restoration; those affected taken into consideration; empowerment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability defined in terms of receiving punishment.</td>
<td>Accountability defined as understanding impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and suggesting ways to repair harm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PUNITIVE DISCIPLINE ASKS...** | **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ASKS...**
---|---
What rule was broken? | Who was harmed? 
Who broke it? | What are their needs? 
How should they be punished? | Who will be held accountable for making things right? 

**PUNITIVE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES...** | **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES...**
---|---
Lecturing Students | Student-Student Mediations 
Self-Directed Detentions | Staff-Student Mediations 
In School Suspension | Peace Circles 
Out of School Suspension | Reinstatement Conversations 
Expulsion | Community Building Circles 

*It should be noted that punitive and restorative discipline can, and will be, used in tandem. However, each discipline infraction will involve a Restorative Justice practice, but not necessarily a punitive discipline practice. For example, when a student is returning from suspension they will, at a minimum, also have to take part in a reinstatement conversation.*