

The School Discipline Consensus Project:

Supporting Schools to Improve Students' Engagement and Juvenile Justice Outcomes

Millions of U.S. public school students in grades K–12 are suspended or expelled in an academic school year,¹ particularly students in middle and high school.² Research demonstrates that when students are removed from the classroom as a disciplinary measure, the odds increase dramatically that they will repeat a grade, drop out, or become involved in the juvenile justice system.³ These negative consequences disproportionately affect children of color as well as students with special needs.⁴

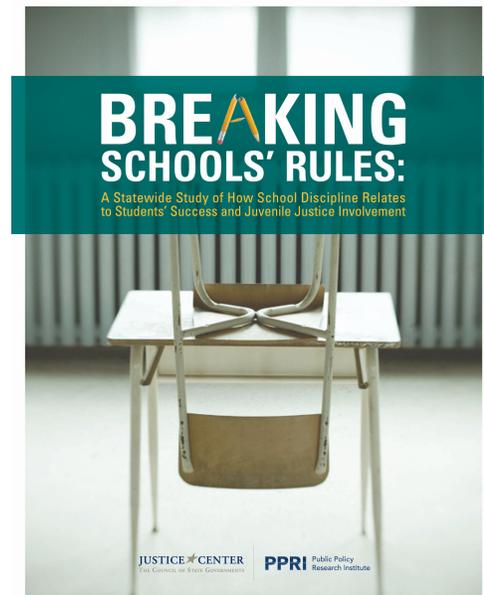
Policymakers and practitioners have a growing need to identify strategies for effectively managing students' behavior and aligning schools' policies in order to support student engagement and learning, and reduce poor academic outcomes and juvenile justice contact. Although some states and local governments have taken promising steps to address these issues, decision makers and front-line practitioners lack a comprehensive, multisystem approach to making school discipline more effective.

In response, the Council of State of Governments (CSG) Justice Center has been conducting a national consensus-building project that convenes experts in such fields as school safety, behavioral health, education, juvenile justice, social services, law enforcement, and child welfare. Youth, parents, and community partners also play a critical and active role in the project to develop creative solutions.

Multidisciplinary advisory groups are identifying key issues related to academic success, juvenile justice concerns, and safe and engaging learning environments. Drawing on research, promising practices from across the country, and the expertise and experience of individuals affected by school disciplinary measures, these groups will reach agreement on recommended policies and practices that will make the most effective use of multiple systems' resources.

This project—supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice; Atlantic Philanthropies; The California Endowment; and the NoVo Foundation—is focusing on documenting better ways to match youth to appropriate interventions that can produce academic successes and less frequent juvenile justice involvement. The project will produce a comprehensive report that will provide implementation guidance on minimizing the dependence on suspension and expulsion to manage student behaviors, improving students' academic outcomes, reducing their involvement in the juvenile justice system (including alternative strategies to school-based arrests and direct court referrals when appropriate), and promoting safe and productive learning environments.

The School Discipline Consensus Project final report is scheduled to be released in February 2014. The report will be available at, <http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/projects/school-discipline-consensus-project/>.



This work builds on a two-year CSG Justice Center collaboration with the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University to study nearly one million public school students in Texas over a minimum six-year period. Findings from the *Breaking Schools' Rules* report describe how suspension and expulsion rates, even among schools with similar student compositions, can vary dramatically. It is clear from the study's findings that efforts in individual schools can make a difference. It is also evident that schools alone cannot make widespread and lasting advancements without a commitment from law enforcement, courts, probation, treatment professionals, and the many other disciplines that affect students' success.

For more information on the School Discipline Consensus Project, contact Local Initiatives Division Director Blake Norton at bnorton@csg.org or 240-482-8584. Project updates, the *Breaking Schools' Rules* report, and other resources can be found at, <http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/projects/school-discipline-consensus-project>.

Other Key Findings from the Texas Study

- Of the nearly 1 million public secondary school students studied, about 15 percent were suspended or expelled 11 times or more; nearly half of these students with 11 or more disciplinary actions were also involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Repeated suspensions and expulsions predicted poor academic outcomes. Only 40 percent of students disciplined 11 times or more graduated from high school during the study period, and 31 percent of students disciplined one or more times repeated their grade at least once.
- Only three percent of the disciplinary actions were for conduct in which state law mandated suspensions and expulsions; the rest were made at the discretion of school officials primarily in response to violations of local schools' conduct codes.
- African-American students and those with particular educational disabilities were disproportionately disciplined for discretionary actions.

The Council of States Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

¹ U.S. Department of Education data revealed that the national number of suspensions rose from about 1.7 million (3.7 percent of all students) in 1974 to more than 3.3 million (6.8 percent of all students) in 2006. (These numbers do not include in-school suspensions. The data represents 61% of public schools and 43% of districts). Researchers from the UCLA Civil Rights Project estimate that well over two million students were suspended during the 2009-2010 academic year, according to their analysis of 2009-2010 U.S. Department of Education data for districts: Daniel Losen and Tia Elena Martinez, *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools* (Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, 2013). An analysis of 2009 data is forthcoming.

² Russell Skiba and Daniel Losen, *Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis* (Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, 2010); Russell Skiba and M. Karega Rausch, "Zero Tolerance, Suspension and Expulsion: Questions of Equity and Effectiveness," *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues*, edited by Carolyn M. Evertson and Carol S. Weinstein (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006): 1063-89.

³ Tony Fabelo, Michael D. Thompson, Martha Plotkin, Dottie Carmichael, Miner P. Marchbanks, III, and Eric A. Booth, *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement* (New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011); Linda M. Raffaele Mendez, "Predictors of Suspension and Negative School Outcomes: A Longitudinal Investigation," *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 99 (2003): 17-33; Russell Skiba, Ada Simmons, Lori Staudinger, M. Karega Rausch, Gayle Dow and Renae Feggins (2002) "Consistent Removal: Contributions of School Discipline to the School-to-Prison Pipeline." Paper presented at the Harvard Civil Rights Project's School-To-Prison Pipeline Conference, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 16-17, 2003; Russell Skiba and M. Karega Rausch, "The Relationship between Achievement, Discipline, and Race: An Analysis of Factors Predicting ISTEP Scores," *Children Left Behind Policy Briefs, Supplementary Analysis 2-D* (Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, 2004); Robert Balfanz and Christopher Bocciafuso, *Falling off the Path to Graduation: Middle Grade Indicators in Boston*, (Baltimore, MD: Everyone Graduates Center, 2007).

⁴ Daniel Losen and Tia Elena Martinez, *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools* (Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, 2013); Fabelo et al. 2011; Hanno Petras, Katherine Masyn, Jacquelyn A. Buckley, Nicholas S. Jalongo, and Sheppard Kellam, "Who is Most at Risk for School Removal? A Multilevel Discrete-Time Survival Analysis of Individual-and-Context-Level Influences," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 103 (2011): 223-37; Michael Krezmien, Peter Leone, and Georgiana Achilles, "Suspension, Race and Disability: Analysis of Statewide Practices and Accounting," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 14 (2006): 217-26.