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Document Title: Reducing Exclusionary Discipline and Ensuring School Safety: An Exploratory, Mixed-Methods Analysis of School Discipline Reform in Massachusetts

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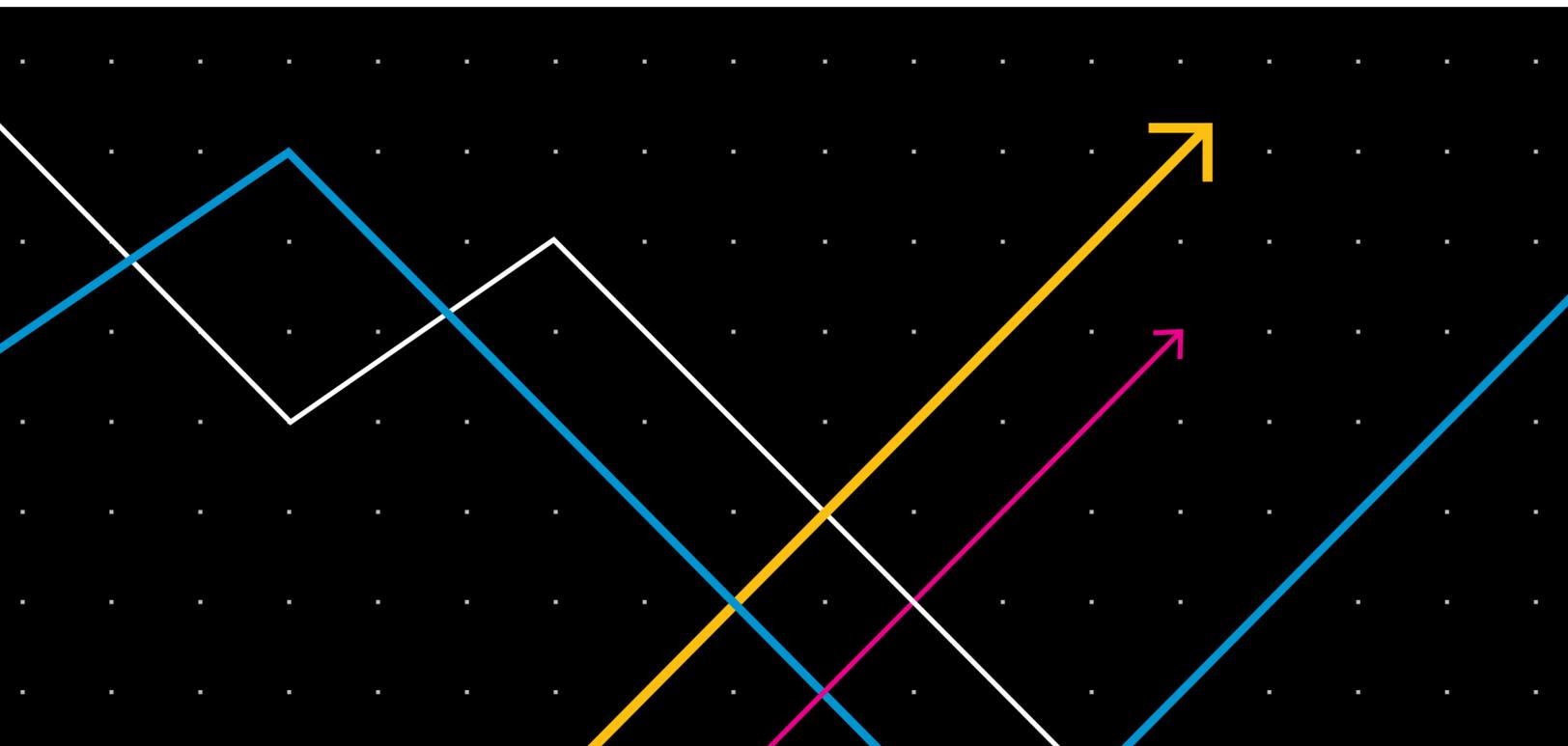
Document Number: 305084

Date Received: July 2022

Award Number: 2016-CK-BX-0022

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RESEARCH REPORT

Reducing Exclusionary Discipline and Ensuring School Safety

An Exploratory, Mixed-Methods Analysis of School Discipline Reform in Massachusetts

Tracey Lloyd, PhD, and Team

January 2020



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Acknowledgments

This project was supported by Award No. 2016-CK-BX-0022, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

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This research was conducted by an Urban Institute research team including Anamika Dwivedi, Sino Esthappan, Constance Hull, Kalito Luna, Emily Reimal, Alexandra Ricks, Eleanor Wilson, and Lilly Yu. We thank the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for providing administrative student management and school discipline records. Carrie Conaway, Kendra Winner, Rachelle EnglerBennett, Stacy Cabral, and Donna Traynham at DESE provided helpful feedback on preliminary findings. We also thank the many district and school leaders across Massachusetts who took the time to discuss this study with us, including those who entrusted us to collect original data in their schools amid other pressing obligations. We also thank the students, parents, teachers, counselors, and other staff members who chose to share their expertise and experiences with us during interviews and focus groups, and hope we have done their perspectives justice here.

Executive Summary

In 2012, the Massachusetts state legislature passed An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School (Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012), its most comprehensive school discipline reform in two decades.¹ Like similar laws in other states, Chapter 222 required school districts to achieve specific outcomes—including reducing long-term suspensions, reducing disparities by students’ races/ ethnicity and disability status, and providing academic instruction during periods of disciplinary exclusion—without specifying how they should achieve them. This spawned a wide variety of reforms mirroring the diversity in reforms occurring across the nation.

With funding from the National Institute of Justice, the Urban Institute conducted an exploratory, mixed-methods study of these reforms to generate new evidence on efforts to reduce exclusionary discipline and their effects on school climate and safety. Although we focus on Massachusetts public schools, the lessons learned from these efforts are applicable to other US school districts facing mandates or other formal or informal pressures to reduce exclusionary discipline and eliminate disparities therein.

Research Questions and Methods

The Urban team aimed to document trends in discipline before and after Chapter 222, identify the strategies (if any) administrators used to reduce out-of-school suspensions (OSS), and obtain a range of perspectives on the reforms’ effects on school climate and safety.

We sought to answer the following four research questions:

- How are district- and school-level administrators and other school staff responding to requirements to limit the use of OSS and address disparities by students’ race/ ethnicity and disability status?
- What implementation-related challenges and unintended consequences did districts and schools experience?
- How do administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders perceive the reforms’ implications for school climate and safety?
- To what extent do administrative data reflect perceptions on the ground?

Our research design combined administrative-data analysis of all public school students in Massachusetts with original qualitative data collection in four secondary schools, three with high (top 25 percent) or very high (top 10 percent) prereform suspension rates, and a fourth with a typical rate for comparison purposes. We examined administrative data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on discipline and safety in every public school district in the state; we also conducted **in-depth, semistructured interviews** with key personnel and district and school leaders and **focus groups** with teachers, students, and parents in our four case study schools. Key personnel included district- and school-level administrators, school disciplinarians, guidance and adjustment counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school resource officers, and other personnel whose positions involve addressing student behavioral issues.

Trends in Official School Discipline Records

Per official records, OSS rates declined for all Massachusetts public school students after Chapter 222, as well as for each racial/ethnic student subgroup. OSS rates also declined for general education students and students with disabilities. These declines were not concentrated in a few large schools or districts, but instead were broadly shared by secondary schools across the state. Importantly, these declines were achieved without comparable increases in other strategies that exclude students from classrooms: reported incidents of in-school suspension (ISS) and expulsion also decreased. Moreover, decreases in OSS rates did not typically coincide with increases in documented serious safety concerns, including fights and weapons infractions.

Despite this progress, racial disparities and disparities by disability status persisted. We also found substantial disparities in emergency removals (a new disciplinary response category) between Latinx and white students in a subset of school districts, although emergency removals occurred infrequently compared with OSS. And official records could not reveal the degree to which administrators may have been using exclusionary practices unofficially, such as sending students home early without recording an official suspension.

Perspectives of School Leaders, Teachers, Staff, and Students

In our qualitative data, we found that administrators employed a broad range of strategies to reduce the use of OSS: revising codes of conduct, implementing restorative practices, modifying use of existing in-school disciplinary spaces, and renewing efforts to improve staff-student relationships. Staff, students, and parents generally supported reform goals. The most common view was that OSS is not an effective deterrent but should be used sparingly and purposefully.

Nonetheless, school leaders, staff, and students expressed numerous challenges and concerns with implementation of reforms. Some school leaders and personnel perceived a gap in their toolkit where exclusionary discipline used to be, and voiced a need for new, cost-effective approaches to fill that gap. In addition, reduced suspension rates sometimes appeared to have contributed to strained relationships between administrators and teachers, in part because some teachers accustomed to more frequent OSS viewed suspension as a symbol of administrator support.

Although we asked about safety-related concerns resulting from disciplinary reform, we generally did not find them. In one school, teachers voiced general safety concerns, but these seemed to predate the reform efforts. Some students reported perceiving that misbehavior had decreased alongside suspension reductions, because students who had previously acted out in order to “go home” (or who wanted “vacation”) knew they would no longer be sent home.

District and school leaders, teachers, and other school adults—who were collectively less racially diverse than the student populations they served—only occasionally raised issues of racial equity and sometimes hesitated to discuss the issue. Others offered explanations for racial inequalities—for example, the overlap between race and poverty or immigration status—that our analyses of their discipline data did not bear out. Some school leaders and staff reported lacking the resources or expertise they needed to make additional progress toward eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in discipline.

Recommendations

Based on our results, we recommend that state policymakers prioritize identifying effective low -cost alternatives to exclusionary discipline, direct sustained resources to restorative justice practices and other evidence-based alternatives to suspension, and consider tradeoffs between reducing *levels* of discipline and *disparities* in discipline when selecting performance metrics. District and school leaders should involve staff, students, and families when developing reforms; clearly and repeatedly communicate the purpose and mechanics of reforms; debrief teachers about actions taken after incidents that would previously have resulted in suspension; and use data to scrutinize local working theories about the causes of racial and ethnic disparities in discipline. People evaluating reforms should average schools' disciplinary rates across multiple years to smooth out annual fluctuations, examine changes in sorting of students across and within schools, and triangulate official school discipline and safety records with student and staff climate surveys and systematic observations of disciplinary practice.

Reducing Exclusionary Discipline and Ensuring School Safety

Introduction

Between the 1970s and the early 2010s, US public schools increasingly used exclusionary discipline to respond to various behavioral infractions, including interpersonal violence and other serious threats to school safety. However, pressure from youth and civil rights advocates, evidence that exclusionary discipline harms students, and guidelines issued by the Department of Education in January 2014 have begun reversing this trend.² State legislatures and local school districts have been reforming policies related to exclusionary discipline, especially out-of-school suspension (OSS). These reforms typically dictate what schools should *not* do; however, they less often specify what strategies administrators *should* use in place of exclusionary discipline or allocate resources to implement alternative approaches. In many cases, administrators have discretion in determining how to meet the laws' requirements.

But because OSS is cheaper than even its closest alternatives³, and because evidence-based approaches like restorative justice (RJ) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) are comparatively expensive and complex, critics fear that administrators facing pressure to reduce OSS rates may rely on ineffective or counterproductive strategies that could undermine school safety or other student outcomes.

In short, more US public school districts and personnel are being pressured and legally mandated to reduce OSS rates and eliminate disparities in discipline, but they may also lack the knowledge and resources necessary for effective reforms. Thus, the Urban Institute analyzed recent reforms designed to curb exclusionary discipline and reduce disproportionately high discipline rates for Black and Latinx students and students receiving special education services. Though this report is not a formal evaluation of Chapter 222 or of any particular school's or district's reform efforts, we offer recommendations for future evaluations in the discussion section.

Trends in School Discipline

Over the past 40 years, US schools broadly changed how they manage student behavior. Corporal punishment declined, zero tolerance policies emerged and proliferated, and schools implemented surveillance strategies once reserved for criminal justice (Hirschfield 2010; Robers, Zhang, and Truman 2010; Simon 2007). Driven largely by school safety concerns, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 mandated one-year expulsions for firearms possession on school campuses. After this act, US school districts began adopting and applying “zero tolerance” disciplinary codes. Although these policies were initially limited to weapons possession and other serious infractions, schools and school districts began applying them to less serious, nonviolent behaviors. School administrators increasingly responded to misbehavior with disciplinary strategies (particularly OSS) that exclude students from school.

Like incarceration rates (Pettit and Western 2004), rates of OSS have disproportionately increased among Black and Latinx youth. According to Office for Civil Rights data, the annual suspension rate for white secondary school students increased slightly between the early 1970s and the 2009–10 school year, from 6.0 to 7.1 percent. During that period, the rate for Latinx students increased from 6.1 to 12 percent, and the rate for Black students increased from 11.8 to 24.3 percent (Losen and Martinez 2013, 1). Among middle school students, 31 percent of Black boys and 17 percent of Black girls were suspended during the 2019–10 school year (Losen and Martinez 2013, 9). National statistics also reveal high OSS rates among students with disabilities: during the 2009–10 school year, 19.3 percent of secondary school students with disabilities were suspended at least once, nearly triple the rate of students without disabilities (6.6 percent) (Losen and Martinez 2013, 13).

Research on OSS

There is little evidence that OSS improves school or student-level outcomes, and research consistently finds strong associations between suspension and negative outcomes at these levels. Schools with high suspension rates typically have poor academic performance and climate ratings (Christie, Nelson, and Jolivette 2004; Skiba et al. 2014; Steinberg, Allensworth, and Johnson 2014; Wu et al. 1982). Suspended students are more likely than their peers to repeat grades, to leave high school without a diploma, and to be arrested and incarcerated,⁴ and are less likely to enroll in and graduate from college (Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox 2014; Shollenberger 2014; Terriquez, Chlala, and Sacha 2013).

Recent studies have found statistically significant relationships between suspension and negative student outcomes, even when important differences between suspended and nonsuspended students are carefully controlled (Fabelo et al. 2011; Lacoé and Steinberg 2019). This suggests suspension does

not simply co-occur with other problems but actually causes students' outcomes to worsen. In addition, studies find that harsh disciplinary policies do not discernibly deter violent behaviors or classroom disruption (Maimon, Antonaccio, and French 2012; Way 2011) and suggest that attending a school with a high suspension rate can negatively affect academic achievement, even for students who are not suspended (Perry and Morris 2014).

Recent Reforms to Reduce OSS

Partly because of the aforementioned trends, **education policy has shifted away from exclusionary discipline.** Since the 1990s, state legislatures and local school districts have been reforming policies related to exclusionary discipline, especially OSS.

These reforms have used many strategies. A common reform is to limit suspensions by **reducing the range of infractions that schools can use OSS and other exclusionary measures to address** Policy makers have focused on reducing the use of suspension and expulsion for truancy, general disrespect or noncompliance, uniform violations, and other infractions not deemed threats to school safety. It is also common to **prohibit suspensions for students below certain ages** for example, Connecticut prohibits suspension and expulsion for students in pre-K through second grade,⁵ and Louisiana, Oregon, and Texas restrict the infractions for which young children can be given OSS. **Other reforms include restricting suspension lengths, requiring that students continue receiving educational services during suspensions, increasing due process and parental involvement, and requiring district-level approvals for each suspension.**

Few reform efforts have been rigorously, externally evaluated; however, preliminary analyses, reports released by states and districts, and journalistic accounts provide some evidence about their effects. For example, early reports suggested that the Los Angeles Unified School District's ban on suspensions for "willful defiance"—a subjective category of behavioral infractions shown to drive disproportionate OSS rates among Black girls in other places (Blake et al. 2014)—had reduced overall OSS rates. In 2015, the California Department of Education released data showing a 53 percent drop in suspensions over two years.⁶ Moreover, a preliminary analysis of the School District of Philadelphia's code-of-conduct reforms in 2012 and 2013 found that they reduced the use of suspension, especially for low-level, nonviolent infractions (Lacoe and Steinberg 2016).

Despite some reforms' apparent success, observers have described implementation challenges and unintended consequences. First, some critics are concerned that the tremendous pressure to reduce suspension rates means suspensions are being underreported.⁷ Second, some educators have

objected to the changes and advocated for more comprehensive reforms. For example, in 2014, Minneapolis Public Schools imposed a temporary ban on suspensions for prekindergartners, kindergartners, and first graders that was poorly received by teachers unions, which called for more resources (including counselors and mental health providers) in lieu of changes to disciplinary practices (Johnson 2014).⁸ Third, some schools have implemented practices to reduce suspensions that may compromise students' and educators' well-being, including carrying pepper spray, handcuffing students during the school day, and administering various forms of corporal punishment.⁹ And a preliminary analysis of Chicago Public Schools' efforts to reduce the use of long-term suspensions revealed that teachers and students felt less safe at school overall in the two school years postreform (Mader, Sartain, and Steinberg 2016).

Evidence on Alternative Approaches

Notably, recent reforms have typically dictated what schools should not do, rather than specifying what concrete strategies and resources they should use to replace OSS and implement alternative approaches. Despite this, research has noted examples of at least two promising approaches: restorative justice and positive behavioral interventions and supports. Restorative justice in particular has proliferated and has a growing evidence base; however, numerous RJ models and approaches exist (Fronius et al. 2016). Moreover, many districts implement restorative justice with short-term external funding that can be difficult to sustain.¹⁰ Despite some evidence supporting alternative approaches, we know relatively little about the breadth of such approaches and how effectively they meet schools' goals. More generally, we lack systematic information about how school leaders and communities approach reforms and the successes and challenges they experience.

Research Questions

We designed our research questions knowing that official records would provide an important but incomplete picture of the effects of school discipline reform. We began our analysis by examining trends in administrative data across Massachusetts—including information on every public school student in the state—to measure changes in reported disciplinary and safety incidents pre- and postreform. We viewed these data alongside data from interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders. During our analysis, we sought to answer the following four research questions:

- How are district- and school-level administrators and other school staff responding to requirements to limit the use of OSS and address disparities?
- What implementation -related challenges and unintended consequences did districts and schools experience?
- How do administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders perceive the reforms' implications for school climate and safety?
- To what extent do administrative data reflect perceptions on the ground?

Research Design Overview

To answer these questions, we conducted **an exploratory, mixed-methods research project** examining school-level reforms in Massachusetts, which had recently revised its school discipline laws through Chapter 222 to curb exclusionary discipline and reduce disciplinary disparities across student subgroups. **Although Chapter 222 only applies to Massachusetts schools, its provisions are consistent with guidelines the Department of Education issued in 2014 and are similar to those being implemented in other states and districts.** Like similar reforms in other states, it mandated specific outcomes—including capping long-term suspension rates, reducing racial disparities and high suspension rates among students with disabilities, and providing academic instruction during disciplinary periods—without specifying how schools and districts should achieve them (the “Chapter 222” text box offers additional details; Taylor and Cregor [2018] also offers a thorough description). Chapter 222 has thus spawned a variety of reforms across the state that mirrors the diversity in reforms occurring across the US.

Our research design anticipated this variety across districts and combined statewide administrative data analysis for all public schools in Massachusetts with original qualitative data collection in a strategic sample of secondary schools. The administrative data, which we analyzed for statewide trends in school discipline, violence, and safety, were provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). We collected our qualitative data from key stakeholders in four secondary schools selected for their prereform OSS rates.

We collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews with district - and school-level administrators, school disciplinarians, guidance and adjustment counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school resource officers, and other school security personnel, as well as through focus groups with teachers, parents, and students. Triangulating these perspectives provided

a more comprehensive portrait of the reforms , helped us examine whether changes documented in official records reflected perceptions on the ground , and surfaced implementation -related challenges and unintended consequences that quantitative analyses alone would have missed.

Importantly, this study was *not* a formal evaluation of Chapter 222 or of particular district reforms, because it was too early to know how such an evaluation should have been structured. And framing it as a formal evaluation may have discouraged staff and students from disclosing valuable information that they worried would reflect poorly on their schools. Instead, we framed this as exploratory research aimed at uncovering reforms' official results and their effects on school climate and safety as experienced by staff, students, and other stakeholders.

[INSERT TEXT BOX ON CHAPTER 222 ABOUT HERE]

For the quantitative component, we examined Student Information Management System and Supplemental School Discipline Report data for every enrolled public school student in Massachusetts (including students in traditional public schools and charter schools). For the qualitative component, we established research partnerships with four secondary schools from three school districts. We focused on secondary schools because suspension rates in Massachusetts are highest during grades seven through nine.

We used a data-driven approach to select these schools after beginning the study. We began selecting potential partner schools by identifying every secondary school with an OSS rate in the state's top quartile during the school year before Chapter 222 provisions took effect in 2014 (i.e., the 2012–13 school year). We then divided these 175 schools into two groups: high suspenders (top 25 percent, with an annual OSS rate of approximately 10 percent or higher) and very high suspenders (top 10 percent, with an annual OSS rate of 19 percent or higher). Within these groups, we looked for variation in the magnitude of declines in OSS rates by the 2015-16 school year. We aimed to select schools that had varying changes in OSS rates (relatively large declines compared to lower or no declines) and, as a secondary criterion, provided geographic coverage across the state rather than being confined to the Boston area. Although we prioritized recruiting traditional public schools, we had informal discussions with charter school leaders during the school recruitment phase that informed our interpretation of results in other districts .

BOX 1

Massachusetts's Chapter 222: A Case of a Broader Movement

Although school discipline reforms vary, we view Chapter 222 as one in a broader category of reforms intended to curb exclusionary discipline and eliminate racial disparities and disparities by disability status. As a leader in US student achievement, Massachusetts is arguably an ideal environment for implementing school discipline reforms. Thus, schools and districts implementing similar reforms in other states will likely experience many of the challenges we document in this report.

Background on the law:

In 2012, the Massachusetts state legislature passed An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School (Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012), the state's most comprehensive school discipline reform in two decades. Signed into law in 2012, its provisions took effect on July 1, 2014. The law required school districts to limit the number of long-term suspensions (defined as 10 or more total days in a school year), contact parents and increase due process considerations when suspending or expelling students, and ensure students can make academic progress when excluded from school for disciplinary reasons. Although school disciplinarians can suspend students when they commit certain serious infractions or pose an immediate threat to school safety, in most instances, Chapter 222 encourages administrators to consider suspension only after trying lesser alternatives.

When an infraction results in suspension or expulsion, the school district is required to report information about the infraction and details about the specific disciplinary action to the state. Importantly, these reporting requirements took effect during the 2012–13 school year, two years before other provisions. This allowed for strong comparisons of school discipline rates pre- and post-reform. Suspension rates and racial disparities in discipline are published annually, and the state identifies schools with high suspension rates and/or large racial disparities for intervention. Although Chapter 222 provided school administrators rough guidelines about allowable disciplinary actions, it did not provide specific guidance about how to reduce overall suspension rates or disparities by race/ethnicity, disability status, and other student characteristics. Because administrators can use discretion to achieve Chapter 222's goals, the act produced various strategies and reforms.

When we contacted district and school leaders about potential partnerships, we emphasized that our selection process was separate from any lists or rankings created by DESE or other organizations. We also explained that we were not formally evaluating their efforts but attempting to understand their reforms' strengths and implementation-related challenges, as well as their remaining needs and questions. Some district leaders appreciated that we used suspension rates rather than student demographic characteristics to identify their schools.

We explored district s' research application procedures online before contacting districts via phone or email. Some districts did not reply. Others expressed initial interest but chose not to participate (most cited constraints on time or resources). Some districts and schools had concerns about their reputations; although we anticipated such concerns, they were greater than we expected. For example, because school discipline and safety is a sensitive topic, some leaders worried their schools would be perceived as “needing” or being singled out for our study. In a few instances, district and school leaders committed to the research and began planning with us, but later became nonresponsive or withdrew , sometimes due to turnover in the staff member(s) responsible for approving or managing our research partnership.

Over time, we reached out to numerous school districts to discuss the study. While our focus groups and interviews were limited to our four partner schools, the recruitment process benefitted our study because we learned how leaders in a broader range of districts were approaching school discipline reform. Our informal conversations with district and school leaders during this phase informed our understanding of administrators' efforts and concerns across a broad number of districts, as well as our interpretation of our quantitative and qualitative data.

Data Collection

We collected data between spring 2018 and spring 2019. We visited each school at least once during this period, on dates identified in collaboration with school leaders. We conducted a total of 42 in-depth, semistructured interviews with district and school administrators and key staff, including school psychologists, school social workers, school guidance and adjustment counselors, school resource officers, and other school staff whose positions involved student behavior and discipline. We also held focus groups with 51 teachers, 58 students, and a small sample of parents and other adult caregivers.

Although we aimed to conduct interviews and focus groups in person, we followed up by phone on a few occasions when we could not connect with an interested staff member on site . We provided \$30 gifts cards to school staff and parents and \$15 gift cards to students. We also provided students and parents with a list of school discipline and safety resources after the focus groups.

We proposed data collection strategies that respected staff members' time and minimized interruptions of the school day. We proposed holding focus groups after school and interviewing staff at times convenient for them , but we were flexible when school leaders requested other arrangements. Similarly, we proposed reaching out to staff, students, and parents and collecting

RSVP ourselves via phone or a dedicated email account, but school leaders usually opted to email staff about the study before our visits. Some administrators also wanted to help introduce the study to staff, students, or parents in person (e.g., by handing out flyers to parents who attended in-school meetings), so we took care to ensure everyone who met with us understood that their participation was voluntary. We did not disclose information about who ultimately chose to participate with district or school leaders or anyone else.

In the end, our findings speak best to traditional and alternative public high schools—less so to middle schools and charter schools. We did not explicitly aim to visit the very highest-suspending schools in the state; instead, our findings should be viewed as speaking to the experiences of schools with average to high suspension rates in the pre-reform period. But the schools we visited had been using OSS relatively frequently in recent years and were either considering, or had been implementing, a variety of efforts to reduce reliance on OSS as a response to student behavioral infractions. On the whole, these schools' staff members were less racially and ethnically diverse than the students and families they served. In these regards, the schools we visited were very much in line with schools across the United States that are working to implement school discipline reforms. Finally, by recruiting participants through the school context, our results likely do a better job of capturing the views of school leaders, staff, and students who were attending school regularly than those of parents and students who were less regularly engaged with school. However, we know from exit surveys that more than one-third of the students in our focus groups had personally experienced suspension. We analyzed our qualitative data and transcripts using NVivo software and prepared analytic memos by theme, school, and respondent type. We analyzed quantitative data using Stata and R software.

Findings: Trends per Administrative School Discipline Records

Chapter 222 required more comprehensive reporting on exclusionary-discipline measures beginning in 2012–13, two school years before other changes took effect. This allowed us to compare “apples to apples” pre- and postreform. Specifically, we examined records from the 2012–13 through 2017–18 school years, two years before and four years after the reforms took effect on July 1, 2014.

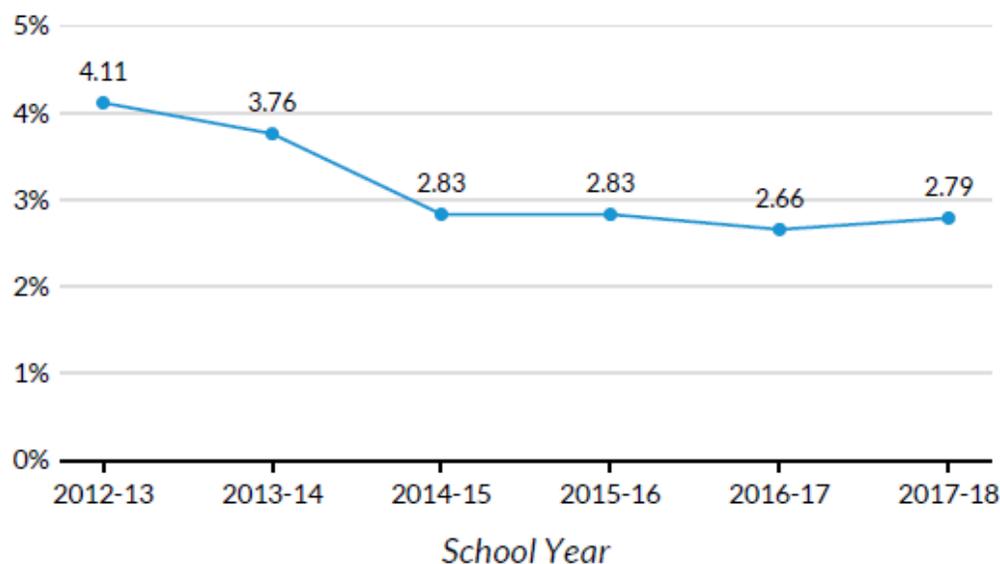
We used data from the Student Information Management System and Supplemental School Discipline Report; these provided enrollment and discipline data (respectively) for every enrolled public school student in Massachusetts. In our “**statewide**” analyses, we calculated discipline rates for

all students in the state, and separately for students belonging to various subgroups. For our “**school-level**” analyses, we aggregated student data by school and calculated discipline rates separately for each secondary school in the state. Because our goal was to describe general trends, we do not rank or name individual schools; moreover, because we found OSS rates to be noisy from year to year (especially for small schools), we recommend that researchers and analysts evaluating changes in individual schools’ OSS rates average those rates across multiple years to obtain more stable estimates of schools’ progress over time (see Kane and Staiger [2002] for a statistical basis for this argument using test scores).

Statewide Analyses

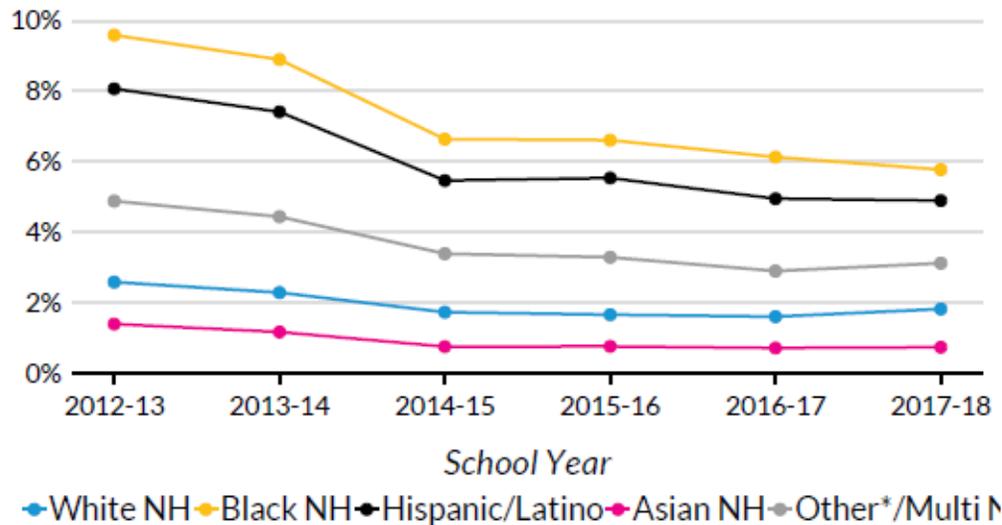
We examined OSS trends among all Massachusetts students and by student subgroup. Rates of OSS declined statewide between 2012–13 and 2014–15 and have remained lower than prereform rates during the four school years postreform (figure 3.1). These decreases have not been limited to white or relatively advantaged students, but have been broadly shared by all subgroups, including Black and Latinx students (figure 3.2) and students with disabilities (figure 3.3). Unfortunately, because of a change in measurement of economic disadvantage, we could not track trends by students’ household incomes before and after the reform.

Figure 3.1. Percentage of Students Suspended Out of School Per Year



Source: SIMS & SDR

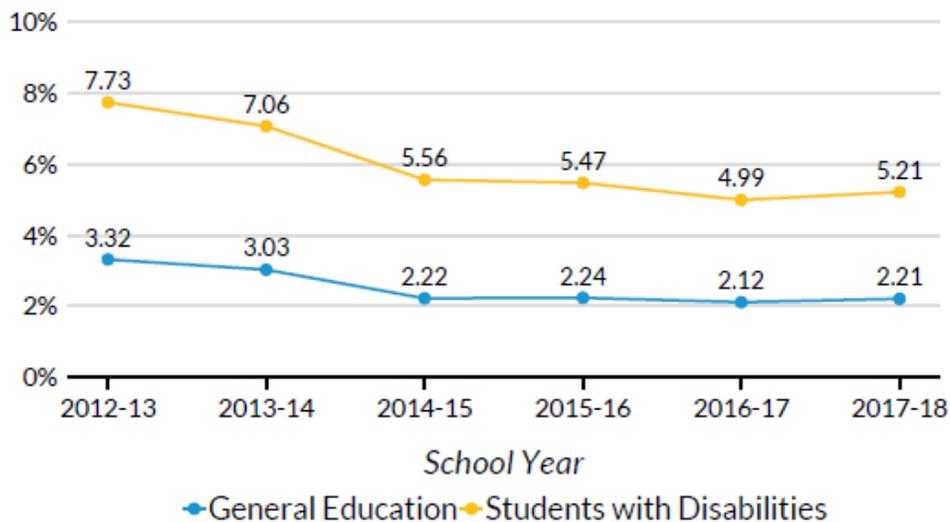
Figure 3.2. Percentage of Students Suspended Out of School Per Year By Student's Race/Ethnicity



Source: SIMS & SSDR

*Other includes Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, & Alaska Native.

Figure 3.3. Percentage of Students Suspended Out of School Per Year By Students' Disability Status

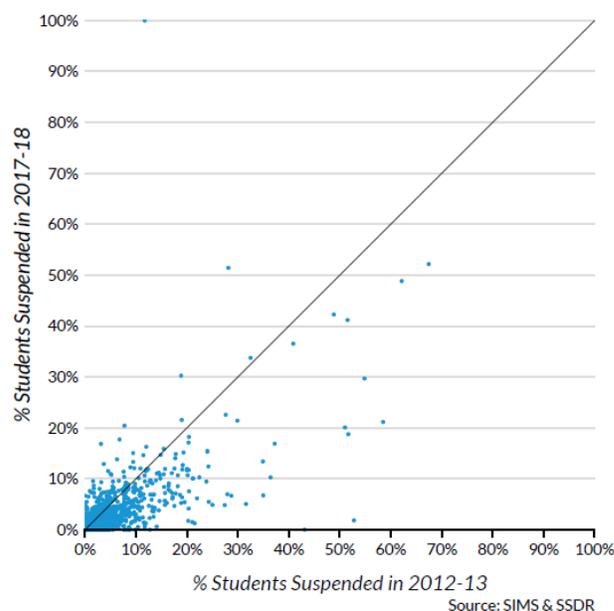


Source: SIMS & SSDR

School-Level Analyses

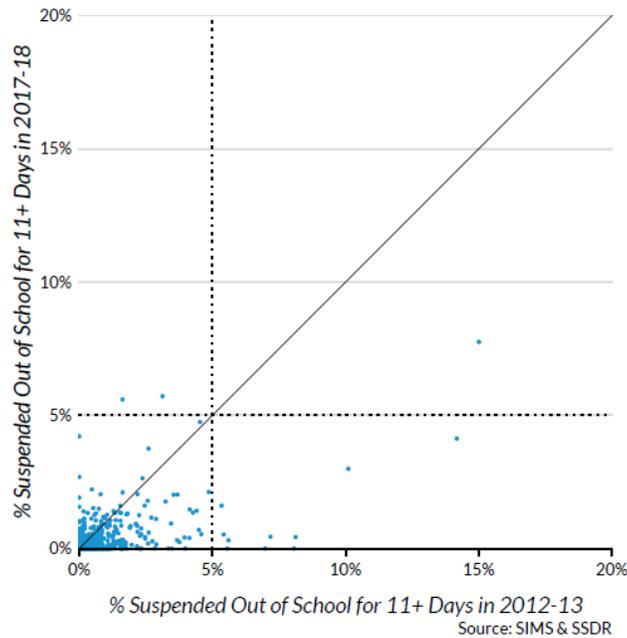
Most secondary schools in Massachusetts have reduced their OSS rates (figure 4.1), meaning the overall decline shown in figure 3.1 is broadly shared, not driven by a small number of large districts or schools. In figures 4.1 through 4.11, each point represents one secondary school. For example, in figure 4.1, points falling along the 45-degree line indicate schools whose OSS rates were the same in the 2012–13 and 2017–18 school years.¹¹ Points above the line indicate schools whose OSS rates were higher in 2017–18 than in 2012–13; points below the line indicate schools whose OSS rates were lower in 2017–18 than in 2012–13. That most points in figure 4.1 are below the line indicates that most secondary schools reduced the share of students to whom they issued at least one OSS between 2012–13 and 2017–18.

Figure 4.1 Out of School Suspension Rates in 2012-13 and 2017-18



Schools largely met the goal of reducing long-term suspensions below 5 percent, and some schools clearly responded to the reform, lowering rates just below that threshold (figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Rates of Long Term (11+ Days) Out of School Suspension in 2012-13 and 2017-18



This is all promising for reformers interested in curbing OSS and increasing equity across racial groups; however, at the school level, most schools still had disparities by race/ethnicity and disability status four years after the reform (see figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5). Disparities in some schools increased as suspension rates declined (appendix A). This suggests that when designing reforms and interpreting results, policymakers and district and school leaders need to weigh the (potentially competing) goals of reducing levels and reducing gaps.

Figure 4.3. Out of School Suspension Rates of Black and White Students in 2012-13 and 2017-18

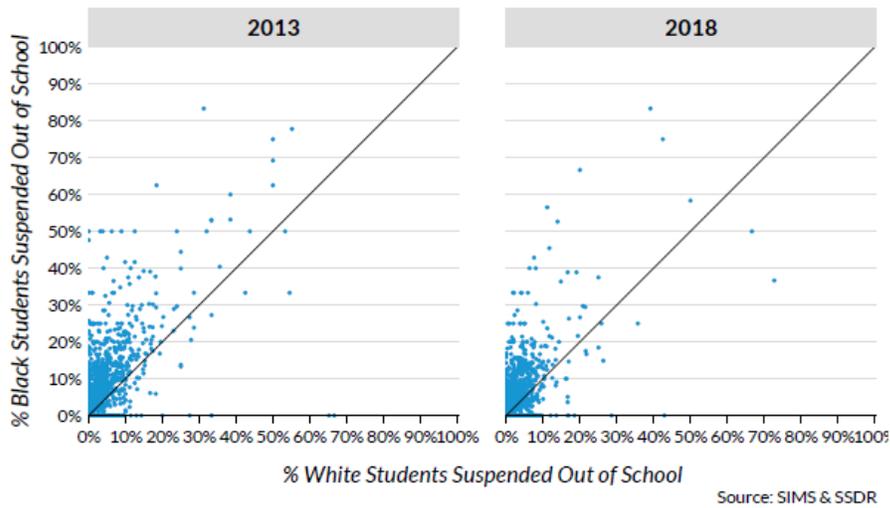


Figure 4.4. Out of School Suspension Rates of Hispanic/Latino and White Students in 2012-13 and 2017-18

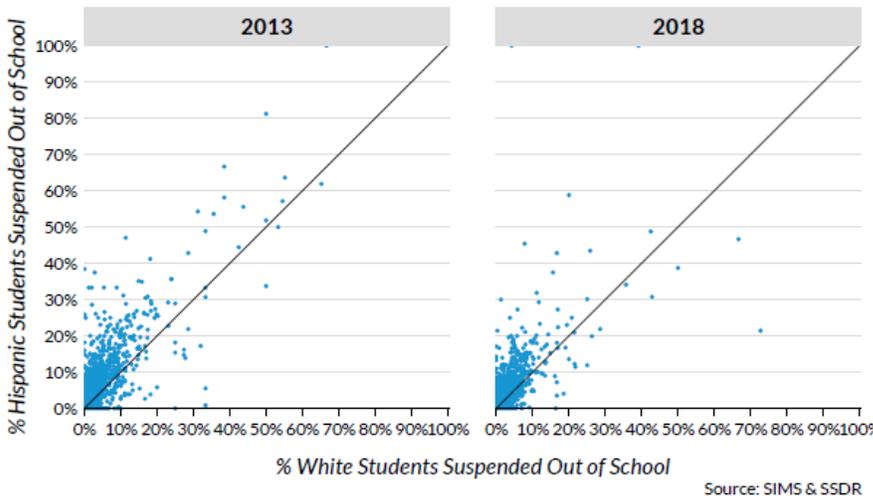
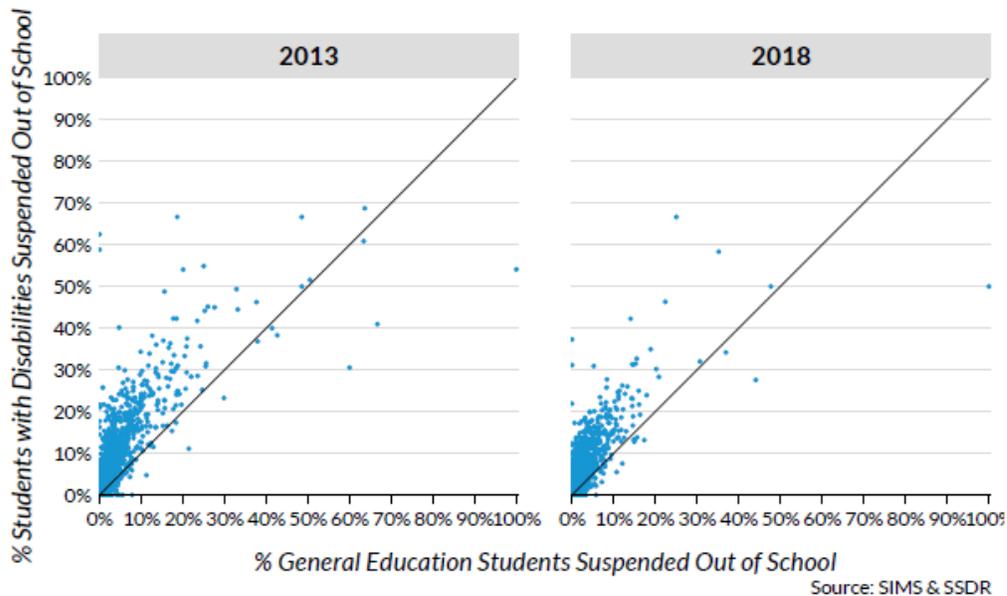


Figure 4.5. Out of School Suspension Rates of Students with Disabilities and General Education Students in 2012-13 and 2017-18



Substitution of Other Forms of Exclusionary Discipline

One concern is whether schools have simply substituted OSS with in-school suspension (ISS) (as in Chicago), emergency removal, or other forms of discipline. Although some schools have increased their ISS rates (figure 4.9) and emergency removals have become more common (figure 4.10), in-school suspensions are lower overall (figure 2.4), and the increase in emergency removals is not large enough to have offset the decline in OSS. Most schools are reporting fewer serious disciplinary actions overall, not just replacing OSS with other types. However, we noted a disproportionate increase in emergency removals among Latinx students, which a few large school districts appeared to drive.

Figure 4.9. Change in In and Out of School Suspension Rates from 2012-13 to 2017-18



Figure 4.10. Change in Emergency Removal and Out of School Suspension Rates from 2012-13 to 2017-18

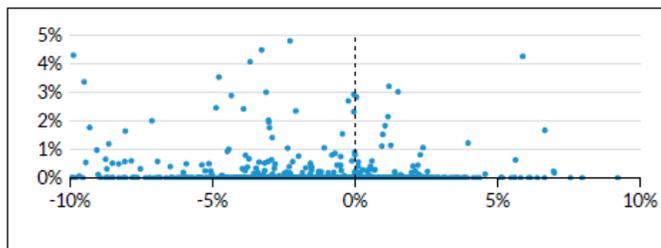
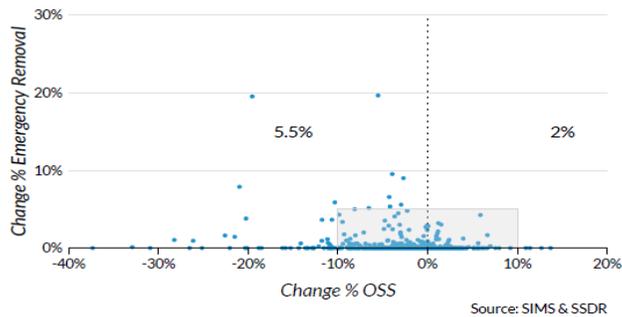
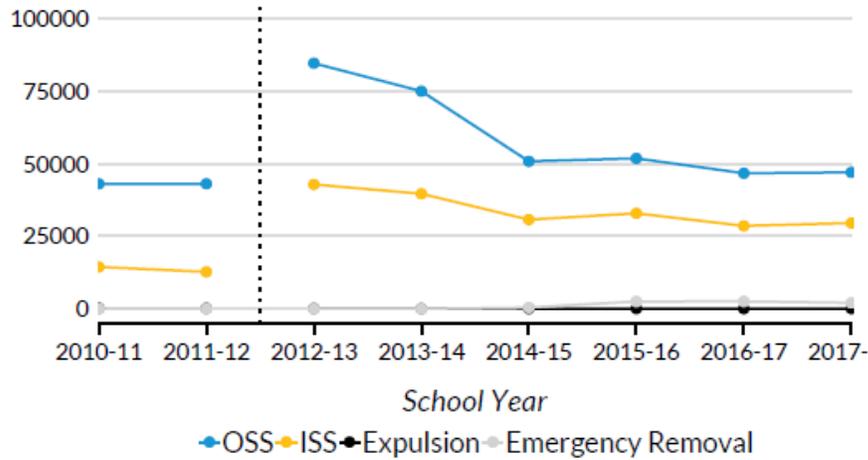


Figure 2.4. Number of Disciplinary Incidents Per Year By Discipline Type



Source: SSDR

Year	In School Suspension	Out of School Suspension	Expulsion	Emergency Removal	Removal by Hearing Officer	Removal by School Personnel
2010	14428	43099	199	0	11	92
2011	12731	43116	156	0	22	86
2012	42892	84712	104	0	11	69
2013	39672	75064	53	0	11	46
2014	30751	50867	41	445	32	38
2015	32932	51883	31	2514	15	18
2016	28601	46756	17	2564	23	58
2017	29575	47070	18	2045	15	213

Effects on Safety

Although some schools that reduced their OSS rates also recorded large increases in rates of fights, this is far from typical (figure 4.11). Statewide, and in most secondary schools, the numbers of fights, assaults, and weapons incidents resulting in reports of serious disciplinary action have declined with OSS rates (figure 2.3). As figure 2.3 shows, “Category 18” infractions—those not involving drugs, violence, or criminal actions—were the most common infractions before Chapter 222 took effect, and although they decreased dramatically, they were still the most common infraction resulting in serious disciplinary action in 2017–18. As overall OSS rates decreased statewide, so did rates of infractions involving bullying, sexual harassment or assault, robbery or theft (or related threats), and weapons. Infractions involving “other serious” behaviors increased. Fights, attacks, and threats initially decreased before increasing to roughly prereform levels.

Figure 4.11. Change in Out of School Suspension Rates and Number of Students Disciplined for Fighting

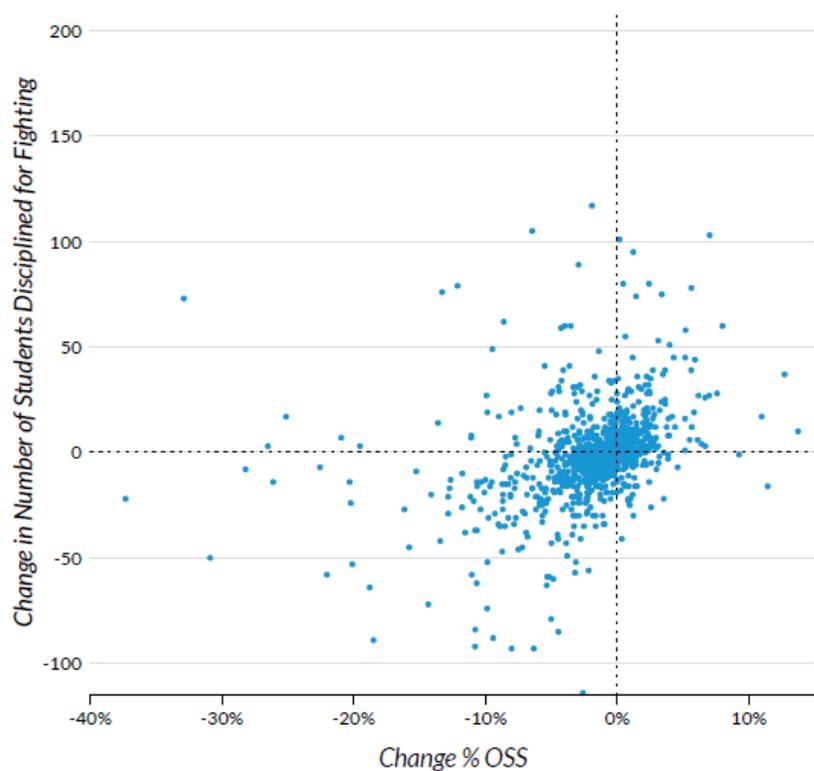
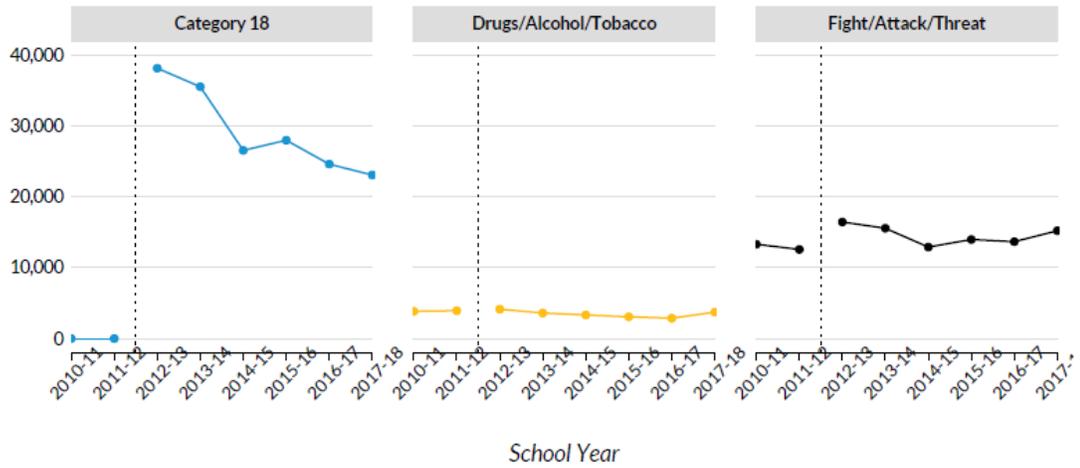
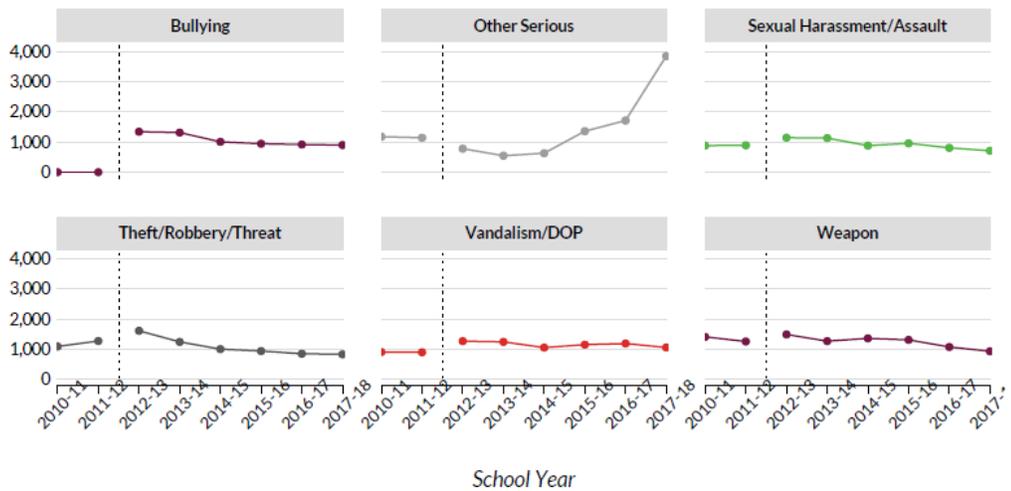


Figure 2.3. Number of Disciplinary Incidents Per Year by Infraction Type



Category 18, Fights/Attacks/Threats, and Drugs/Alcohol/Tobacco are the most common infraction categories. Below are six less common categories, with the scale adjusted to allow for more detail. Please note the max value decreases from 40,000 incidents to 4,000 incidents.



Qualitative Findings

Our quantitative analyses provide insight into documented disciplinary events and how the likelihood of receiving OSS varies by studentsubgroup. However, we also sought to understand the school-level efforts and reforms driving those trends, and how changes to policy and practice were experienced by the people learning and working in these schools every day.

To this end, we spoke with stakeholders in four secondary schools of varied sizes and geographies. Three had high (top 25percent) or very high (top 10 percent) OSSrates during the 2012–13 school year, which we measured for every secondary school in Massachusetts. (We refer to these asschools A, B, and C, respectively.)For comparison, we also spoke with staff and students in a fourth school (school D)with an average prereform OSS rate. We sought primarily to understand the experiences of people whose schools had been relyingheavily on OSSboth because they would be most likely to “feel” the effects of curbing OSS, and because their collective responses to Chapter 222 were important for reducing statewide OSS rates.However, we did not necessarilyseek out the state’s highest-suspending schools,so our results may overlook or underrepresent implementation challenges in those schools. In addition, our qualitative results likely capturemore of the range of views of administrators and staff than of students and their families, given that the latter are more numerous.

We found that descriptions of activities, challenges, and concernswere generally consistent across schools Thus, we discuss our findings generally and note where results diverge by prereform OSS rates or other school characteristics. In interpreting our qualitative data, we also draw on informal conversations with district and school leaders who considered partnering with us but ultimately did not. These conversations revealed time constraints, reputational concerns, and other obstacles pertinent to our analysis. We usepseudonyms for schools and districts to ensure that we can keep those who spoke with us anonymous.

Understanding and Communicating Reforms

Most district and school leaders we spoke with were familiar with Chapter 222, and some had expert knowledge. District leaders often began responding to the law by consulting with attorneys about what it meant and required. School leaders and staff often learned about Chapter 222directly from their superiors during professional development sessions or other all-staff meetings.

Although teachers and key staff were generally aware of Chapter 222, they were less aware of the range of changes it required. Though Chapter 222 did not explicitly require schools to reduce the shares of students who receive OSS (just the shares who receive long-term OSS), school personnel at all levels commonly thought the law—or their district’s responses to it—required curbing suspension more generally. Some teachers and other personnel understood Chapter 222 simply as requiring them to “watch our suspension rates” and try alternatives before suspending students. Teachers in some schools thought administrators were emphasizing the law (i.e., “this is the law and we have to follow it”) without adequately explaining why it mattered or articulating practical alternative approaches to suspension. In School D, for example, staff members were largely aware of Chapter 222, but teachers and administrators expressed frustration about a lack of clarity around Chapter 222’s goals and pathways to attaining them. Teachers and staff described lacking concrete guidance on alternative approaches, and administrators reported that they did not always know what guidance to give.

In other schools, reform-minded administrators expressed that Chapter 222 helped them increase staff buy-in for changes they had been implementing in their schools long before Chapter 222 was passed. For these school leaders, Chapter 222 was not an impetus for change, but a way to reinforce ongoing change efforts to teachers and other school personnel.

Although administrators often described gaining buy-in for reforms from teachers as a challenge, we found that nearly all teachers—including those who voiced strong concerns about implementing the reforms—broadly supported the goal of reducing the use of OSS. The most pervasive view was that **suspension should be used sparingly and purposefully, but “still be an option.”**

Implementing Reforms: A Range of Strategies

After consulting with attorneys, district and school leaders employed **a range of strategies** to comply with the law and reduce OSS more generally. A common first step was to review and **revise codes of conduct** and update student handbooks. This step was ongoing for some school leaders, who planned committees and outreach to parents to finalize changes. District and school leaders also **communicated Chapter 222’s requirements (and other revisions to their schools’ disciplinary approaches) to teachers and other staff**. These conversations had varying degrees of detail, and staff in multiple schools wanted to explicitly follow up with leaders about the changes throughout the school year. In School A, for example, school leaders introduced discipline reforms at a staff meeting just prior to the start of the school year, but had not followed up on the topic in recent months;

teachers and other staff had already begun to deprioritize these efforts and reported wanting to readdress these issues at upcoming staff meetings.

In addition to updating written policies and communicating legal requirements to teachers and staff, district and school leaders commonly **offer ed staff training**, including training on restorative justice, social-emotional learning, and related topics. Some schools partnered with external agencies to offer these trainings. Moreover, all four schools reported having adopted a **“restorative” approach to discipline** in some capacity, but definitions and activities (e.g., circles and mediation) varied widely across and within schools. In multiple schools, stakeholders reported that restorative practices were being implemented unevenly within the school (see “Adopting Restorative Practices” section)

Personnel and students also described **modifying their use of existing school spaces** to better address student behavior. Strategies included having teachers visit in-house disciplinary spaces to provide academic materials to students and creating spaces where students could “take a break” for a few minutes. One school offered a veteran teacher with an unusually strong rapport with students a reduced teaching schedule so they could meet with students (in an office adjacent to their classroom) as an interim step between other teachers’ classrooms and the administrator’s office (this practice seemed to be working well).

School leaders and staff also mentioned a need for **improved staff-student relationships**, particularly through positive reinforcement. Staff often said that efforts to improve relationships with students and implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (or similar approaches) were interrelated.

In some schools, staff members also described changes in the student population over time. In some cases, new alternative schools had opened in recent years, or staff perceived that decisions about how to allocate students to schools had recently changed. (Whether these perceived changes actually occurred and whether school discipline reforms drove them were beyond the scope of our study; however, future analyses should examine whether districts and schools achieve required reductions in OSS at the school level by reallocating students across schools within the district, or by employing strategies that make students who are likely to be suspended more likely to leave the district altogether.) Likewise, multiple school leaders shared with us concerns that other schools were under- or misreporting suspensions; although we saw no evidence of informal dismissals or related practices during our visits, future evaluations should consider this possibility, particularly in devising ways to hold schools accountable without penalizing schools with thorough reporting practices.

Some district and school leaders used resources provided by DESE's **Professional Learning Network (PLN)** and online data-analysis tools. Though some schools did not seem to view their participation in the PLN as strictly voluntary – having been invited to attend by DESE based on their prior years' OSS rates—district partners (and other school leaders who considered partnering with us) described finding utility in the opportunity to discuss these issues with other school leaders and attend DESE-hosted training sessions. Specifically, some school leaders expressed that statistics and research they learned about at these trainings helped them convey Chapter 222's importance to their own teaching staff. Some leaders also found DESE's online resources helpful but some were confused about how to use the publicly available discipline data or lamented that the lag in publishing data made the resources less useful than they could have been. One administrator reported wanting DESE to notify them when updated school discipline data were made available on the website to allow for timely view of results. This need was particularly pressing because many district leaders said they lacked the resources to analyze their own school discipline data to the extent they would have liked.

Additional strategies to reduce exclusionary discipline included **increased collaboration and oversight** between schools and districts' central offices—such as having principals call district leaders to discuss each suspension-eligible infraction, as well as alternative approaches to providing education, including to students with felony convictions and through online programs/ virtual schools.

Adopting Restorative Approaches: Variation in Practices and Depth

All four secondary schools we partnered with —as well as many schools that did not partner with us — reported taking a restorative approach to discipline in some capacity. Restorative justice (RJ) approaches are notoriously variable across places, with the term being used to denote a variety of practices (Fronius et al. 2016). Indeed, although we found that most schools referred to RJ, most were implementing what could be called “RJ-inspired activities” rather than applying a particular RJ model with fidelity. In the schools we visited, these activities included the use of circles during homeroom or advisory periods, teacher trainings, and mediation of student conflicts. Within schools, implementation was often partial and variable across teachers and classrooms. Perceptions of the RJ activities' effectiveness varied, and school leaders and teachers reported that they were challenging to implement and maintain.

School A offers an illustrative case. Whereas administrators reported that the district and school were phasing in restorative practices, some teachers and key staff described incorporating restorative elements into conversations with students on their own, not as part of a schoolwide approach. Other

teachers reported no knowledge of a restorative approach; however, they seemed to notice that discipline was changing but did not know why or how. These teachers were likely unaware of the restorative approach because administrators only notified the teachers once, just before the school year. Administrators reported that their message was probably lost during this busy time of year, and they expected to dedicate an upcoming faculty meeting to discussing the changes more thoroughly.

Teachers and key staff members who were aware of attempts to use restorative practices believed that implementation had been inconsistent within the school. They identified several reasons for this, including some teachers failing to follow through, lack of clear leadership, the work being brand new for them, not everyone being part of it, and a lack of school or district-wide RJ standards to which they could adhere. Despite the rocky rollout, some administrators and teachers supported restorative discipline and wanted it to continue.

In all schools, administrators and teachers cited time and resources as major barriers to systematically employing RJ practices. One administrator lamented, “There literally isn’t enough time in the day to do the job I’m supposed to do, and there certainly isn’t time to do the stuff that I would like to do. We’re doing more restorative stuff, but again, that takes longer.” Respondents expressed that fully implementing restorative practices would require “massive” effort and “solid supports” (including time-consuming trainings), and that growing class sizes and heavy caseloads preclude teachers and other key staff members from dedicating sufficient time.

Effects on School Climate and Relationships

Teachers, administrators, and other staff broadly agreed that suspension was ineffective and that OSS should be reduced. Moreover, many school personnel said that curbing exclusionary discipline required (or went hand in hand with) proactive efforts to strengthen staff-student relationships and prevent behavioral problems. In School A, school staff members launched a schoolwide effort to build school community and pride, but this seemed to resonate better with parents and staff than with students.

Despite some expected challenges with staff-student relationships (especially in larger schools), students generally felt they had someone they could go to if concerns about discipline or safety arose. One particularly charismatic teacher had been made an intermediary between teachers and disciplinarians, an arrangement that teachers, students, and administrators approved and credited with deescalating conflicts that may previously have resulted in suspension. Students in some schools were temporarily shuffled to other teachers or classrooms, allowing teachers and students to cool off and

avoid more formal discipline. Veteran teachers in some schools were concerned about a “new breed” of students whose behavior presented special difficulties, although these views may have predated disciplinary reforms.

At each school, stakeholders of all levels voiced a need for **more adjustment counselors** to assist students and families with behavioral and other concerns. They also acknowledged that their current adjustment counselors played an important role addressing students’ behavioral issues (both proactively and after incidents occurred). Moreover, some stakeholders recommended routinely involving adjustment counselors in serious disciplinary incidents that may result in removal from school. A few respondents also wanted a greater police presence in their schools, although they typically did not specify how police should be deployed to address discipline and safety.

Strengthening Administrator -Teacher Relationships

Teacher-administrator relationships are critical for discipline, and respondents identified challenges with these relationships that the reforms may have exacerbated. Administrators often reported that getting teachers to buy in to the reforms was a challenge; however, teachers described being open to reforms, even when they were critical or frustrated with them. Moreover, school leaders and district administrators almost universally appreciated that teachers are closer to students and therefore should have discretion in handling many behavioral issues.

Although they generally supported Chapter 222’s goals, teachers and administrators noted that teachers wanted some disciplinary action in place of suspension. Teachers often emphasized (and we observed through our conversations with all parties) a need for improved communication between the administration and teachers following disciplinary incidents. Particularly for veteran teachers, suspension often symbolizes administrator support for their classroom authority; thus, curbing suspension may require administrators to communicate their support in new ways. Teachers reported wanting more consistent follow-up after incidents, and some wanted administrators to be more transparent about disciplinary decisions in the postreform era.

Consistent discipline is a common concern (especially in larger schools) and relates to the quality of administrator-teacher relationships. Some teachers were unclear about rules for discipline before and after reforms and wanted more guidance from administrators about when they could use their discretion. Moreover, some students felt confused by different classrooms’ unique rules, and some staff and students expressed that clarifying which infractions have prescribed responses could reduce inconsistency; confusion among teachers, students, and parents; and perceptions of unfairness. One

district leader noted, “Inconsistency is inevitable...[and it’s good]...but help students to navigate it.” Zero-tolerance approaches limited teachers’ discretion, and teachers support the shift away from those approaches; however, not knowing what adults will tolerate or consider misbehavior (and what the repercussions for their actions will be) was a challenge for some students

Safety Implications

Although safety is a primary concern among critics of discipline reform (and a key motivator for this study), respondents rarely reported that efforts to reduce OSS were making schools less safe. Staff in one school did feel that reduced suspensions increased misbehavior. However, students in that school said that misbehavior among students who had “wanted to be sent home” under the previous disciplinary structure had decreased. Moreover, parents (even those of children who had not been disciplined) rarely discussed safety risks and when they did, they were typically concerned about the building’s physical security and about preventing gun violence. Instead, they supported inclusive discipline and alternatives to suspension, which were often framed as building relationships with students. These findings were consistent with our quantitative analysis, which found that increases in serious safety concerns were uncommon.

Acknowledging and Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Although racial and ethnic disparities in discipline persisted postreform, the adult stakeholders we spoke to only occasionally mentioned them without prompting. Some school leaders and staff offered theories about disproportionate suspension rates among Black and Latinx students and about the intersections of race and immigration or income; however, student-level data often did not support these theories (we checked). This suggests a need for increased attention to analysis of existing school discipline data to inform school personnel of places where their working knowledge and documented practices are not well aligned. However, several district and school leaders noted that they did not have the resources necessary to analyze data as thoroughly and regularly as they would have liked. Although some administrators accessed data resources on DESE’s website to examine trends in discipline in their schools, we did not find that most schools were using them regularly to reflect on discipline disparities in particular. One administrator mentioned that the data available online were not up-to-date enough to be useful for their school’s planning purposes.

[ADD REFERENCE TO COMPANION BLOG POST ON RACIAL DISPARITIES]

OR TEXT BOX ON RACIAL DISPARITIES HERE.]

Discussion and Conclusions

Massachusetts's statewide decline in OSS rates for all students and for each student subgroup — driven by declines in a large majority of the state's secondary schools—occurred alongside a broad range of efforts to curb exclusionary discipline and implement alternative disciplinary approaches that keep students in school and minimize harms to longer-term trajectories. Despite some administrators' concerns that teachers were reluctant to embrace reforms, we found that administrators, teachers, nonteaching staff, students, and parents alike broadly supported reducing suspension. Stakeholders of all types generally espoused the belief that OSS should be used sparingly and purposefully.

Nonetheless, school leaders, staff, and students expressed numerous challenges and concerns with implementation of reforms. Some school leaders and personnel perceived a gap in their toolkit where exclusionary discipline used to be, and voiced an unmet need for new, cost-effective approaches to fill that gap. In addition, reduced suspension rates sometimes appeared to have contributed to strained relationships between administrators and teachers, in part because veteran teachers accustomed to more frequent OSS viewed suspension as a symbol of administrator support.

Although we looked for safety- and misbehavior-related concerns, we generally did not find them. In one school, teachers voiced safety concerns, but these seemed to predate the reform. Somewhat surprisingly, a small share of students reported perceiving that misbehavior had decreased alongside suspension reductions, because students who had previously acted out in order to “go home” (or who wanted “vacation”) knew they would no longer be sent home.

Finally, the clear progress in reducing reported incidents—at the state and school levels—was not matched by a similar clear-cut trend in reducing disciplinary disparities. Instead, disparities fluctuated widely alongside overall declines. District and school leaders, teachers, and other school adults—who were (in the aggregate) disproportionately white relative to the student populations they served—only occasionally raised issues of racial equity without prompting and sometimes hesitated to discuss the issue when we asked. Those who discussed racial and ethnic disparities with us sometimes offered explanations for these inequalities—for example, that the correlation between race and poverty or immigration status would explain them—that our analyses of their discipline data did not bear out. Other school leaders and staff wanted to discuss these issues but reported lacking the resources or

expertise they needed to make additional progress toward eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in discipline.

Recommendations

We explicitly asked respondents for recommendations for improving discipline and safety in their schools. The most common response from all stakeholders was additional resources, including additional adjustment counselors. Staff in large schools also called for additional teachers to reduce class sizes and allow for more proactive relationship-building with students. In addition to documenting stakeholders' suggestions and recommendations, we also distilled recommendations from our own analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

We recommend that state policymakers require expanded data collection before implementation of reforms (as the Massachusetts legislature did), dedicate sustained resources to implementation of restorative justice practices and other evidence-based alternatives to suspension, and consider tradeoffs between reducing levels and reducing disparities in discipline when selecting accountability metrics. District and school leaders should engage staff, students, and families when developing reforms; clearly and repeatedly communicate reforms' purposes and mechanics; debrief teachers about actions taken after incidents that would previously have resulted in suspension to assure teachers that they have administrator support; and use data to examine local working theories about the causes of racial and ethnic disparities in discipline. Evaluators of discipline reforms should average schools' discipline rates across multiple years to smooth out annual fluctuations, examine changes in sorting of students across schools (in addition to within-school trends), and triangulate official records with student and staff climate surveys and with systematic observations of disciplinary practice.

We list specific recommendations for each group below.

For Funders and Policymakers

- Identify and promote effective, low-cost strategies for reducing out-of-school suspension.
- Provide resources for ongoing implementation and improvement of restorative justice.
- Follow the Massachusetts legislature's lead in requiring expanded data collection at the time of or prior to implementing reforms.

- Put disparities on the agenda; when identifying performance metrics, consider the tradeoffs between focusing on reducing rates and reducing disparities.
- Publish trends in discipline by school, and alert district and school leaders and community members when data become available online.

For District and School Leaders

- Solicit input from students, parents, and staff when revising codes of conduct.
- Clearly communicate with parents and students to increase buy-in for reforms; seek student input to design positive behavioral supports that resonate with the student body. Ensure that students of color, ELL students, students with disabilities, and their families are central to these efforts.
- Clearly and repeatedly communicate with staff about reforms' legal requirements, the broader goals they are aiming to achieve, and the structure and mechanics of schoolwide efforts to achieve them.
- Ensure consistent communication between school disciplinarians and teachers so that teachers are aware of the outcomes of disciplinary incidents. Recognize that suspension may have symbolized administrator support, and additional efforts to communicate support may be required as the school shifts toward a more inclusive disciplinary approach.
- Reimagine in-school suspension as a strategic site for intervention.
- Offer students and teachers physical spaces in which they can "take a break" to prevent behavioral infractions, deescalate tensions, and process emotions after behavioral incidents occur.
- Formalize interim interventions (e.g., trusted staff members) between classroom teachers and disciplinarians with the power to suspend.
- Put reducing disparities on the agenda. Tailor efforts based on staff and student racial composition. In schools with racial mismatch between students and school adults, prioritize hiring and retention practices that promote diversity and inclusion and model openness to interrogating disparate impact of behavior and to examining theories with data.

For Evaluators and Researchers

How should researchers evaluate reforms designed to curb OSS and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in suspensions? To date, reforms to reduce the use of OSS have been evaluated using administrative records. However, as our results demonstrate, this approach can overlook implementation challenges and produce misleading results. Understanding why some reforms appear to be successful while others fail – and identifying the mechanisms that drive success and failure – requires triangulating official records with the perspectives of staff, students, and families and considering that some disciplinary actions that remove students from the classroom may not appear in official records. We recommend the following:

- Be aware of expected (“natural”) annual fluctuations in OSS rates, especially in small schools. Average schools’ rates across multiple years to smooth out these fluctuations and observe more accurate signals of school-level trends.
- Triangulate official school discipline and safety records with student and staff climate surveys and with systematic observations of disciplinary practice to determine the frequency with which “soft suspension,” reallocation of students across classrooms, and other informal “time outs” from students’ regular classrooms are being utilized.
- Examine changes in sorting of students across schools (including within districts, as well as across districts) in addition to examining within-school discipline trends.

We also recommend that researchers expand on our work in several important ways, including by focusing on elementary schools, exploring tradeoffs between reduced levels and reduced disparities in discipline in greater depth, and examining overlap between OSS rates and chronic absenteeism. We hope that the results presented here will be useful toward these goals.

Notes

- ¹ An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School, 2012 Mass. Acts 222, 6 August 2012.
- ² These guidelines were rescinded in 2018 but efforts to reform disciplinary policy appear persistent.
- ³ In-school suspension and afterschool suspension, perhaps the likeliest substitutes, require an unused space within the school building and a qualified adult to supervise students, resources that are not available to all schools.
- ⁴ See Arum and Beattie (1999); Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2014); Bowditch (1993); Fabelo and coauthors (2011); and Shollenberger (2014).
- ⁵ Kathleen Megan, "Both Chambers Pass Bill That Bans Out-of-School Suspension, Expulsion of Young Children," *Hartford Courant*, May 29, 2015, <https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-suspensions-bill-passes-both-chambers-0530-20150529-story.html>.
- ⁶ The success of this policy in reducing overall OSS rates led to the passage of statewide legislation limiting the use of suspension for willful defiance. In the fall of 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed a law prohibiting willful defiance suspensions for students in kindergarten through third grade (Siders 2014). Howard Blume, "Big Drop in Number of California Students Who Are Suspended, Expelled," *New York Times*, January 15, 2015, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-california-schools-suspended-expelled-20150114-story.html>.
- ⁷ Blume, "Big Drop in Number of California Students Who Are Suspended."
- ⁸ Alejandra Matos, "Minneapolis Schools Ban Suspension of Youngest Students," *Star Tribune*, September 5, 2014, <http://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-schools-ban-suspensions-of-youngest-students/274043091/>.
- ⁹ Eli Hager, "When School Feels Like Jail," The Marshall Project, November 11, 2015, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/11/11/when-school-feels-like-jail>.
- ¹⁰ This is not to suggest that funding these initiatives sustainably is impossible, but simply that many schools have relied at least partially on short-term funding streams to implement these approaches.
- ¹¹ Although a given school's rate may have fluctuated over time, a similar pattern can be observed by comparing rates from either pre-reform year to rates from any of the post-reform years.

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