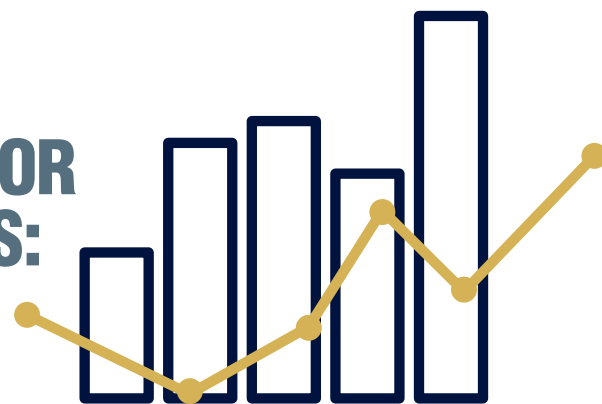


A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, OR BULLYING STUDENT BEHAVIORS: 2015–2016

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This report describes the occurrence of discipline referrals and corresponding interventions and consequences used by schools for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors during the 2015-2016 school year.

Method of study. Using data entered into the West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS), we conducted two sets of analyses—one focusing on discipline referrals to examine the number, seriousness, and types of harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors and interventions used by schools; and a second addressing questions about the characteristics of students reported for these behaviors.

Findings. Of the 240,387 student discipline referrals reported in WVEIS and useable for this report, 3,507 (1.5%) were for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors. Most of these referrals were at the middle school level (47%) followed by high school (32%) and elementary school (20%). The reason reported for 61% of these behaviors was “other characteristic,” suggesting they were not definitively known. Other reported reasons were physical appearance (10%), gender (6%), mental/physical/developmental/sensory disability (6%), or sexual orientation (5.5%). Students referred for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors also were referred for other categories of inappropriate behaviors, including disruptive/disrespectful conduct (50%), failure to obey rules/authority (27%), tardiness or truancy (11%), and aggressive conduct (10%). The main disciplinary interventions or consequences used by schools in response to harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors included out-of-school suspensions (35%), followed by in-school suspensions (19%), detentions (11%), and administrator/teacher and student conferences (11%). Of the 2,936 students referred for disciplinary action for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors, most (86%) were referred for a single offense. Nearly three quarters of the students were male. White students were referred at a slightly lower rate than their portion of the population (85% vs. 91%), while Black students were referred at a higher rate (11% vs. 5%). Other races made up roughly the same proportions as their portion of the overall student population. More than a quarter (27%) of students referred for these behaviors were identified as eligible for special education services. Risk ratio calculations indicate Black students were 2.5 times as likely to experience discipline referrals for these behaviors compared to White students. Similarly, students with disabilities were twice as likely to be referred compared with students without disabilities.

Limitations of study. Findings are dependent on the completeness and accuracy of data submitted by schools and certified as accurate by districts. There was evidence of nonreporting and underreporting. Although a prescribed coding scheme with behavior descriptions has been provided, it is subject to variation in interpretation and usage at the local level.

Suggested best practices include (a) address harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors with evidence-based interventions integrated into a school-wide approach aimed at improving behaviors and overall conditions for learning; (b) build staff capacity to provide interventions in the context of a multi-tiered framework as part of school-wide approaches to promote appropriate behavior; (c) minimize the use of out-of-school suspensions and couple in-school suspensions with interventions; and (d) investigate the issue of subgroup disparity in discipline practices and deliver professional development and technical assistance to schools to help minimize disparities.

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Of all the student discipline referrals reported, about 3,500 (1.5%) were for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors.

Nearly half of these referrals were at the middle school level and nearly three quarters of the students were male.

Of the students referred for disciplinary action for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors, most (86%) were referred for a single offense.

Black students and students with disabilities were referred for this offense at rates higher than their respective proportions within the total student population.