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A Descriptive Analysis of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Student Behaviors 2012-2013

This report describes the occurrence of discipline referrals and corresponding interventions and consequences used by schools for *harassment*, *intimidation*, and *bullying* behaviors during the 2012-2013 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, and bullying behaviors and interventions used by schools; and a second addressing questions about the characteristics of students reported for these behaviors.

Findings. Of the 220,656 student discipline referrals reported in WVEIS, 5,474 (2.5%) were for harassment, intimidation, and bullying behaviors. Most of these referrals were at the middle school level (49%) followed by high school and elementary school at 25% each. Students referred for harassment, intimidation, and bullying behaviors also were referred for other categories of inappropriate behaviors, including disruptive/disrespectful conduct (43%), failure to obey rules/authority (31%), aggressive conduct (12%), and tardiness or truancy (11%). Unspecified or district-defined disciplinary actions accounted for 23% of interventions or consequences used by schools in response to harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors. Of the remaining, 31% were out-of-school suspensions, followed by in-school suspensions (21%), detentions (9%), and administrator/teacher and student conferences (6%). All other interventions or consequences were used at lower rates.

Of the 4,409 students referred for disciplinary action for harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors, most (83%) were referred for a single offense. Nearly three quarters (74%) of the students were male. White students were present at a slightly lower rate than their respective statewide representation (87% vs. 91%), while Black students were present at a higher rate (10% vs. 5%). Other races were present in roughly the same proportions as their representation in the overall student population. A quarter (25%) of students referred for these behaviors were identified as eligible for special education services. Risk ratio calculations indicate Black students were twice as likely to experience discipline referrals for these behaviors compared to White students, and multiple race students were 1.5 times more likely. Similarly, students with disabilities were twice as likely to be referred compared with students without disabilities.

Limitations of study. 2012–2013 was a transition year as a new discipline management system was deployed. The effect this transition had on the completeness or accuracy of data is not clear. Other limitations were noted.

Recommendations include (a) address harassment, intimidation, and 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 appropriate behavioral interventions in the context of the three-tiered Support for Personalized Learning (SPL) framework and integrate SPL 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 to avoid depriving students of needed supports; 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 the total student discipline referrals reported in WVEIS, 2.5% were for harassment, intimidation, and bullying behaviors.

Most of these referrals were at the middle school level (49%) followed by high school and elementary school at 25% each.

Black students and students with disabilities are over-represented in the discipline referral data-- indicating the need to investigate subgroup representation in more detail, and to build capacity to address disparities in discipline practices.