



Improving school discipline data collection and reporting:

A status report for the 2012–2013 school year.

A statewide analysis was conducted on school disciplinary incidents reported during the 2012–2013 school year—the first full year under the revised Policy 4373. Findings from the analysis are provided to help inform districts and schools about what supports they may need to improve school climate, including more positive approaches to student discipline.

Method of study. Using 2012–2013 data entered into the West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS), we conducted two sets of analyses—one focused on discipline referrals (DRs) to examine the number, seriousness, and types of behaviors and interventions used by schools; and a second addressed questions about student subgroup representation in the discipline data.

Findings. The analysis used 220,656 discipline referrals entered into WVEIS, which represents a rate of 786 discipline referrals per 1,000 students. Some schools submitted no DRs, suggesting under-reporting. About 45% of DRs were made for students in high school, 39% for middle school, and 17% for elementary school. About two thirds of DRs were for Level 1 minimally disruptive behaviors, followed by 27% for Level 2 and 10% for Level 3 behaviors. Referrals for the most severe and illegal behaviors (Level 4) were rare and accounted for less than 1% of all DRs. In response to these DRs, about two thirds of interventions/consequences used by schools were detentions, in-school suspensions, or out-of-school suspensions (26%, 19%, and 17%, respectively). About a third of interventions/consequences for Level 1 minimally disruptive behaviors were some type of detention. However, nearly 27% were in-school suspensions or out-of-school suspensions. There also were 12 expulsions-related actions associated with Level 1 behaviors, which may be disproportionate to the behaviors involved. Nearly 80% of students were absent from the discipline data (no DRs were made for them), while many other students were referred for only a single offense. Students with multiple referrals, however, accounted for 88% of all DRs. Many students were reported for five or more offenses; the highest number for a single student was 71. Black students and students with disabilities were present in the discipline data at rates higher than their representation in the overall student population. Risk ratio calculations indicate Black students to be about two or more times more likely to experience suspensions—although this disparity is lower in West Virginia than for the majority of other states. Students with disabilities also are at higher risk.

Limitations of study. 2012–2013 was a transition year as West Virginia deployed a new discipline management system. It is not clear what effect this transition had on the completeness or accuracy of data summarized in this report.

Recommendations. Four recommendations are offered: (a) encourage diligence in accurately reporting discipline behaviors as required by Policy 4373; (b) provide training/technical assistance specific to positive discipline approaches and alternatives to suspension; (c) build district and school staff capacity to provide appropriate behavioral interventions in the context of the Support for Personalized Learning, three-tiered framework; and (d) further investigate subgroup disparities and deliver professional development and technical assistance specific to minimizing them.

For more information, contact coauthor, Andy Whisman, Office of Research (swhisman@access.k12.wv.us), or download the full report at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2013.html>.

Of all students in West Virginia included in the analysis, most (78%) had no referrals for inappropriate behaviors. Also the most serious offenses (Level 4) accounted for less than 1% of all discipline referrals.

During the 2012–2013 transition year for the new system, there were some inconsistencies in reporting, including schools that reported no discipline referrals at all.

Although suspensions are viewed in Policy 4373 as temporary solutions, they were among the most frequently used interventions or consequences used by districts and schools, even for minimally disruptive behaviors.

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.