



# 2014

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## The Association Between School Discipline and Academic Performance

### A Case for Positive Discipline Approaches

This study examined the impact on student academic performance of referrals for disciplinary intervention in West Virginia. The study also examined differences in these impacts among various student subgroups.

*Method of study.* Using discipline referral data entered into the West Virginia Education Information System for the 2012-2013 school year and employing cross tabulations and binary logistic regression procedures, the odds of scoring below proficiency on WESTEST 2 based on disciplinary involvement and student characteristics were determined. Findings were essentially the same for math and reading/language arts, so results focus only on math.

*Findings.* Of 160,480 students in the analysis, about 29.6% had one or more referrals for inappropriate behaviors. Overall about 12% had only a single referral, 10.4% had 2 to 4 referrals, and 6.7% had 5 or more. Results include the following:

- Students with one or more discipline referrals were 2.4 times more likely to score below proficiency in math than those with no discipline referrals; math proficiency among these students exhibited a 40 percentage point deficit (29.7% vs. 70.3%).
- As the number of discipline referrals increased so did the odds of poor academic performance. Students with 2 to 4 referrals were 2.7 more likely to score below proficiency; students with 5 or more were 4.6 more likely. Students with a single discipline referral saw a 25 percentage point proficiency gap, while 2 to 4 referrals added another 20 points and 5 or more referrals added yet another 20 points.
- When the disciplinary consequences take the form of in-school or out-of-school suspension, the risk of scoring below proficiency increases and proficiency gaps widen.
- Students with disabilities who had a single discipline referral were no more likely to score below proficiency than students with disabilities without discipline referrals. However, when they received 2 to 4 referrals they were 3.7 more likely to score below proficiency; with 5 or more discipline referrals they were 12 times more likely.
- Low income students with a single discipline referral were 1.48 times more likely to score below proficiency than low income students with no referrals; those with 5 or more were 3.25 more likely.
- While previous studies showed Black students to be at greater risk of receiving discipline referrals and suspensions, no interaction was found between disciplinary involvement and race relative to academic performance.

*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* include (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 via the Support for Personalized Learning three-tiered framework; and (d) further investigate subgroup disparities and deliver professional development and technical assistance to minimize them.

For more information, contact coauthor, Andy Whisman, Office of Research ([swhisman@k12.wv.us](mailto:swhisman@k12.wv.us)), or download the full report at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2014.html>.

**Less than 30% of West Virginia students were referred for discipline in 2012-2013; only 11% had more than one referral.**

**As the number of discipline referrals increased so did the odds of poor academic performance. When students received an out-of-school suspension, their proficiency decreased even more.**