Pushed Out: Trends and Disparities in Out-of-School Suspension

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Executive Summary

Exclusionary discipline, which involves removing students from the classroom through punishments such as suspensions and expulsions, deprives students of the opportunity to learn. This type of discipline dramatically increased in the United States over several decades as a result of zero-tolerance policies that were often applied to relatively minor, nonviolent misbehavior such as tardiness or "disrespect." Such exclusionary punishments have deleterious consequences and disproportionately impact students of color and students with disabilities.

While suspension is intended to produce safer schools and deter future misbehavior, research shows that exclusionary discipline is ineffective at improving school safety and deterring infractions. This is not surprising, as suspensions do not address any of the underlying reasons that may be leading to behavioral incidents, nor do they create opportunities for students to learn new approaches to communicating or resolving conflicts.

In addition, suspensions may have a long-lasting negative impact on students who are suspended or expelled. Compared to similar students who were not removed from classrooms, suspended students are more likely to suffer academically, repeat a grade, and drop out of school. Suspended students are also less likely to graduate from high school and college and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. In addition, a school climate centered on control and punishment negatively affects students who are not suspended. Studies have found that non-suspended students in schools with harsh exclusionary discipline policies have lower test scores compared to students in lower-suspending schools.

Across time, the risk of suspension has been disproportionate across student groups, contributing to inequity in educational outcomes. Decades of data have shown that certain groups of students are disproportionately suspended, including students of color (except Asian), students receiving special education services, students from low-income families, LGBTQ students, and males. Differences in behavior do not account for the large racial disparities in suspension rates. Prior research has identified a number of school and systemic factors associated with the disproportionate suspension of certain students, including educator implicit bias, insufficient educator preparation, poor educator working conditions, ineffective school leadership, harsh discipline policies, and inequitable resource allocation.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, federal and state policies encouraged the implementation of zero-tolerance policies across the country, which helped fuel an overall increase in the use of suspension and expanded racial disparities in suspension. Recent changes in policy and practice have begun to shift educators away from exclusionary discipline, and we review those changes and trends in this report. We examine out-of-school suspension data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), tracking trends over time. We also assess differences in suspension rates of students based on their race and ethnicity, school level, and disability status. We present data at national and state levels, and because out-of-school suspensions are concentrated in secondary schools, we focus our state-level findings on secondary school students. We explore the ways in which changes in suspension rates may be related to changes in policy, and we make recommendations for additional strategies to reduce school exclusion for all students, and in particular for those who have disproportionately experienced its negative effects.

The findings from this report are mainly based on analyses of the 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18 Civil Rights Data Collection. In looking at national trends in suspension rates, we also included data points from earlier years, which we drew from other research and estimates published by the Office for Civil Rights.

National-Level Findings

- **Overall suspension rates have increased from 1973, reaching a peak in the early 2010s. Since then, suspension rates have generally decreased.** In 1973, the overall suspension rate was 4%. By the 2009–10 school year, suspensions had increased to 7%, with particularly sharp increases from the mid-1980s through the 1990s. Since then, suspension rates have decreased, reaching 5% in 2017–18. This decrease coincided with efforts of the Obama administration to reduce exclusionary discipline and its disparate impacts, including issuing a guidance package to support states, districts, and schools in their efforts to move away from punitive discipline policies and toward research-based, restorative practices. However, the suspension rate in 2017–18 was still higher than the rates of suspensions observed in the 1970s and early 1980s.
- **Educators suspended secondary school students at much higher rates than elementary school students.** In 2017–18, nearly 1 in 14 secondary school students (7%) were suspended—more than three times the rate of elementary school students (2%). In addition, while the overall suspension rate decreased from the early 2010s to 2017–18, the drop was concentrated in secondary schools; decreases at the elementary level were smaller and less consistent.
- **Racial disparities in suspension have persisted across the years.** Educators consistently exclude Black students from school at the highest rate, with more than 1 in 8 Black students (12%) receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions in 2017–18. In that year, educators also suspended Native American students at rates higher than the national average (7% vs. 5%). Black and Native American students have historically been disproportionately suspended in both elementary and secondary schools. While the suspension rates of Latino/a, Pacific Islander, and white students were quite similar across the years in elementary schools, disparities emerge among these racial groups at the secondary school level, where educators suspended Latino/a and Pacific Islander students at higher rates than white students.
- **Educators continue to suspend students with disabilities at much higher rates than their nondisabled peers.** In 2017–18, almost 1 out of 11 students with disabilities (9%) were suspended, compared to 4% for students without disabilities. Black students with disabilities consistently have the highest risk of suspension, with almost 1 in 5 (19%) receiving a suspension in 2017–18.
- **School level, gender, race, and disability status together can substantially impact a student's risk of suspension.** For example, in 2017–18, 1 in 1,000 Asian girls not receiving special education services in elementary schools were suspended (0.1%). However, during that same school year, more than 1 in 4 Black boys with disabilities (27%) in secondary schools were suspended.

State-Level Findings

- **Secondary school suspension rates varied greatly across the country.** In Mississippi, South Carolina, and Washington, DC, 15% of students received at least one out-of-school suspension in 2017–18, triple the rate at which students in California, Connecticut, and Massachusetts were suspended (5%) and more than five times the rate of suspension in Utah (3%). Such variations may be due to differences in state, local, and school discipline policies; educator quality; and efforts to reduce racial disparities in suspensions.
- **Secondary school educators' use of out-of-school suspension decreased in 48 states and in Washington, DC, between 2011–12 and 2017–18.** Such reductions coincided with policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels to replace exclusionary discipline with supportive practices that are associated with decreases in suspension rates and suspension gaps. States with the largest reductions include California and Illinois, which have undertaken a set of policy reforms to limit suspensions. Although these reductions are promising, in five states the decline in out-of-school suspensions came with an even larger increase in in-school suspensions, suggesting that in these states students continued to be excluded from learning opportunities even though they remained in school.
- **Most states reduced racial disparities in secondary school suspensions between 2011–12 and 2017–18.** The Black–white suspension gap decreased among secondary students in 45 states and Washington, DC, the Latino/a–white gap decreased in 47 states and Washington, DC, and the Native American–white gap decreased in 45 states. However, the suspension rates of Black students and the Black–white gap remain high in many states, and the Black–white gap increased in five states: Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, North Dakota, and South Carolina.
- **Between 2011–12 and 2017–18, most states narrowed the suspension gap between secondary school students with and without disabilities.** The disabled–nondisabled suspension gap was reduced in 46 states and Washington, DC. However, even though many states have made progress in reducing suspension gaps, students with disabilities continue to be suspended at extremely high rates. For example, about 1 in 4 students with disabilities were suspended in Delaware (25%), Louisiana (25%), South Carolina (25%), and Washington, DC (24%), in 2017-18.

Policy Implications

Efforts to improve approaches to school discipline must be part of a comprehensive approach to address inequities in educational opportunity. Following are six key policy strategies for reducing suspension gaps and exclusionary discipline practices overall at the state and local levels:

1. **Eliminate zero-tolerance and other exclusionary discipline policies, restrict the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for lower-level offenses, and reduce the length of suspensions for moderate and serious offenses.** States and local education agencies can end zero-tolerance and other harsh policies to provide flexibility for educators to consider the severity and situational context when a student violates school rules. State and local policymakers can also bar disorderly conduct and other nonviolent and

non-drug-related behavior from being reported to the criminal justice system. States and districts can also prohibit exclusionary actions for students who commit nonviolent infractions, and they can place limits on the length of suspension.

2. **Support evidence-based alternative strategies to exclusionary discipline, such as implementing schoolwide restorative practices and teaching social and emotional skills.** Restorative practices are a proactive, relationship-centered approach to building a positive school climate and addressing student behavior. Such practices are integrated with social and emotional learning, as students are encouraged to acknowledge and manage their emotions, develop empathy for others, and establish positive relationships. Research has found that restorative practices are effective in reducing suspensions and improving school climate. States and districts can provide resources to support schools' implementation of restorative practices and teaching of social and emotional skills, including training and coaching school community members, hiring full-time restorative justice coordinators, and reducing class sizes to facilitate closer teacher–student relationships. States and districts can leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title IV, Part A—the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant Program—to fund restorative initiatives.

3. **Collect and report disaggregated data on exclusionary discipline in a timely manner and use the data to inform equity reviews of district and school discipline policies.** States and districts should support schools to accurately report their use of exclusionary discipline, disaggregated by student characteristics. States should also follow the example of California, Rhode Island, and West Virginia to include school discipline in their accountability systems. In addition, states and districts should collect, disaggregate, and publicly report data on the amount of lost instruction due to exclusionary discipline on an annual basis. These data, which schools are already reporting to the federal government biannually, can help identify districts and schools that need extra support to transition to more equitable and restorative discipline practices. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education conducts investigations into schools with high suspension rates and large disparities in suspension and provides technical assistance to these schools to improve their school climate. Legislation in Indiana requires the state education agency to survey school discipline policies and determine the extent to which positive discipline and restorative justice practices are used. The Indiana Department of Education works to ensure that educators have access to the support and training they need to implement restorative practices.

4. **Develop educator preparation standards for supporting positive climates and using restorative practices to manage classrooms.** Many teachers and principals are unprepared to use positive discipline practices that can reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline. States can include competencies in building strong relationships, creating supportive classroom climates, and using restorative practices in their standards for approving educator preparation programs and teacher licenses. For example, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing passed new standards for teachers and administrators, requiring educators to know how to teach social and emotional skills and use restorative practices to manage classrooms.

5. **Provide professional learning to help educators create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments and foster trusting relationships with students.** States and districts can provide resources to enable educators to create positive learning environments. This can include professional development focused on mitigating implicit biases, developing empathy for students, creating multi-tiered systems of support, advancing restorative practices, providing support for students with disabilities, and transforming the school culture to one that values students from diverse backgrounds. In addition to state funds, states can use up to 5% of their state set-asides for statewide activities under ESSA Title II, Part A, for related teacher professional development.

6. **Invest in support services and support staff to better meet the needs of students and educators.** Research shows that access to high-quality and adequate support services is associated with fewer incidences of student behavior issues and lower rates of suspensions. States and districts can allocate resources to provide wraparound supports for high-need students and their families and hire more social workers, counselors, and school psychologists. Hiring a sufficient amount of support staff, such as restorative justice coaches, can also increase the school's capacity to implement restorative practices. These supports also help ease the workload of teachers and administrators, increasing their bandwidth to respond to students' social and emotional needs without resorting to exclusionary discipline. States and districts can use funds from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act and the American Rescue Plan Act to provide increased support services to students.

To support these state and local efforts, policymakers at the federal level can:

1. **Update and reissue the 2014 "Non-Discriminatory Administration of School Discipline" guidance.** Many students of color, particularly Black and Native American students, continue to be disproportionately suspended. Although progress was made under the 2014 guidance in limiting exclusionary disciplinary practices and reducing racial disparities in discipline, implementing restorative practices, and protecting civil rights, the guidance was revoked in 2018. The guidance should be reissued and updated regularly to align with research on effective and non-discriminatory practices. The updated guidance should include additional information on resources to increase access to mental health services and supports, particularly for student of color; best practices for building positive school climates through restorative practices; and suggestions for revising codes of conduct to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline for ambiguous infractions, such as "willful defiance." The guidance should also clarify the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights statutory oversight and enforcement role to investigate claims of discriminatory school discipline practices.

2. **Support the dissemination and use of newly released Department of Education resources aimed at reducing exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities.** Despite some progress over time, students with disabilities continue to be disproportionately suspended. In July 2022, the Department of Education released guidance on the legal requirements for disciplining students with disabilities under the Individuals With Disabilities Act and supportive materials to help educators meet the needs of students

with disabilities. Federal policymakers can dedicate resources to promote this guidance and support states, districts, and schools in implementing changes to their current discipline practices.

3. **Offer technical assistance and increase oversight and accountability to ensure that states and districts accurately report data on their use of exclusionary discipline and referrals to law enforcement.** To better understand the use of suspension in schools, the Office for Civil Rights also should require schools to report the total number of suspensions a school issued, in addition to the number of students who were suspended and the total days students missed due to suspensions. This would enable government departments, researchers, and advocates to identify states, districts, and schools with high suspension rates, high magnitudes of lost instruction, and large disparities in suspension rates and to intervene as appropriate.

4. **Provide additional funding for professional learning that helps educators create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments and adopt restorative discipline practices.** The federal government can support professional learning opportunities that help educators create positive learning environments by increasing funding through ESSA Title II, Part A. Additional resources could be targeted toward professional development activities focused on areas that can reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, such as restorative practices, supporting students of color and students with disabilities, developing empathy for students, and employing asset-based approaches that help students build social and emotional skills.

Introduction

The interrupted learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that students' well-being and achievement decline when they miss out on school time.[1] However, regularly losing out on learning is not new for millions of students. Educators' widespread use of exclusionary discipline deprived many students of the opportunity to learn for decades prior to the pandemic. In the 2017–18 school year, more than 2.5 million students attending U.S. public schools received one or more out-of-school suspensions. These students missed a total of 11.2 million school days, with each student missing 4.5 school days, on average.[2] Not only do suspended students lose learning time, but they also lose access to essential noninstructional services provided by schools, such as occupational and physical therapy, mental health services, and meals.[3] Disturbingly, historically underserved students are suspended at much higher rates than their peers.[4]

Suspension results from adult interpretation of student behavior and decisions on how to react. For instance, teachers make decisions about what behavior is considered disruptive and whether to ignore the behavior, redirect a student inside the classroom, or refer a student to a school administrator. School administrators decide whether to refer a student to a counselor, provide the student with guidance, exclude the student from a classroom, or counsel the teacher on how to better respond to situations. What is considered a violation and who receives support, a warning, detention, suspension, or an expulsion is a function of student, school, and system factors.[5] Reasons students are suspended include a wide range of perceived violations, including tardiness, defiance, dress code violations, physical fighting, and possessing dangerous objects.

Evidence shows that although educators suspend students with the intent to keep schools safer, improve school climate for learning, and promote positive behavior, exclusionary punishment is ineffective for achieving these goals. In schools with higher suspension rates, both students and teachers tend to perceive school safety to be worse, after controlling for various school and student characteristics.[6] Schools that suspended students more frequently also showed the largest decrease in climate measures such as school connectedness and opportunities for meaningful participation.[7] In fact, some studies suggest that the use of exclusionary discipline can create emotional disengagement and erode the level of trust students feel toward school officials.[8] Research finds that harsher use of exclusionary discipline is associated with more frequent behavioral write-ups.[9] It is unclear whether that increase in suspension is a function of increased behavioral incidents from the students, educators' bias in interpreting students' behavior, or both. Nonetheless, it leads to continued exclusion of students from the classroom.

Schools that suspended students more frequently also showed the largest decrease in climate measures such as school connectedness and opportunities for meaningful participation.

Students who have been suspended are more likely to have lower academic achievement and repeat a grade, compared to peers who were not suspended.[10] One study looking at 3 years of administrative data on a million students in Texas found that 60% of middle and high school students had been suspended or expelled at least once. Among students who had relatively minor violations (e.g., tardiness or insubordination), those who were suspended or expelled for those

violations were twice as likely to repeat a grade, compared to students with similar characteristics who were not suspended for those violations.[11] In addition, students who have been suspended are more likely to drop out[12] and are less likely to earn a high school or college degree.[13] A study that followed 10th-grade students in California for 3 years found that, after controlling for other major dropout factors, suspensions in California lowered graduation rates by nearly 7 percentage points.[14]

Suspension may also have a negative academic impact on students not receiving suspensions. One study found a relationship between harsher exclusionary punishments and lower test scores among peers of suspended students.[15]

In addition to exclusionary discipline harming academic achievement and attainment, scholars have linked it to the school-to-prison pipeline,[16] as students who received suspension are more likely to eventually be involved in the criminal justice system than their peers.[17] Young adults with a history of school suspension are also less likely to vote and less likely to participate in civic activities.[18] Ultimately, exclusionary discipline measures are associated with significant social costs in the form of lost wages, lost tax revenue, and higher welfare and medical costs.[19]

The rate of suspensions increased substantially between 1970 and 2010 before beginning to decline in recent years. With rates increasing much more for some groups than others, discipline gaps grew wider and wider, contributing to inequities in both educational opportunity and outcomes. Decades of data have shown that certain groups of students are disproportionately suspended, including students of color (except Asian students), students receiving special education services, students from low-income families, LGBTQ students, and males.[20] There is also disparity in the length of suspensions issued. Data from the New York City public school system showed that Black students received longer suspensions than students from other racial and ethnic groups for 8 of the 10 most common infractions and were suspended for roughly twice the number of days for bullying, reckless behavior, and altercation, compared to Asian students.[21] Research has found that racial disparities in suspensions are most strongly associated with differential treatment of students rather than differences in student behavior, with the former accounting for 46% of the Black–white suspension gap and the latter accounting for 9%.[22]

About This Report

This report examines out-of-school suspension data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), tracking trends over time and differences in suspension rates of students based on their race and ethnicity, school level, and disability status. We present data at national and state levels, and because out-of-school suspensions are concentrated in secondary schools, we focus our state-level findings on secondary school students. We also describe the factors research has found associated with the use of suspension.

To examine suspension over time, we analyze CRDC suspension data from the 2011–12 school year (the earliest year during which the data was collected from all public schools) through 2017–18 (the most recent year of CRDC data). In looking at national trends in suspension rates, we also included data points from earlier years, which we drew from other research and estimates published by the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR). While this report focuses on the national and state levels, we note that there is substantial variation in suspensions within states. Within a state, there are districts that suspend at far higher and lower rates than the state average and schools within districts that suspend at higher and lower rates than the district average.[23]

The report expands on work the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) previously supported documenting the prevalence and impact of exclusionary discipline.[24] This report also builds on LPI's prior work, *Protecting Students' Civil Rights: The Federal Role in School Discipline*, which details effective school discipline policies and practices designed to end discrimination. In addition, this report is part of LPI's *Inequitable Opportunity to Learn* series, which uses the CRDC data to understand the extent to which historically underserved students experience inequities in their opportunities to learn—including who teaches them, what they are taught, and how they are treated.

Reflection on the use of out-of-school suspension is particularly salient while educators work to help students recover from lost instructional opportunities and trauma experienced during the first years of the pandemic.[25] Given that pre-COVID-19 suspension rates were excessive and disproportionate in many schools, continuing to suspend students with the same frequency as before will likely exacerbate the emotional and academic toll. Disturbingly, recent news articles report that several school districts are showing that suspensions and expulsions are reaching or exceeding pre-pandemic levels.[26]

The report describes suspension rates and gaps at the national level and state levels. It then describes factors that influence the use of suspensions and disparities in suspension rates and concludes with recommendations for policymakers.

Definitions for This Report

Out-of-school suspension – Refers to when a student is temporarily removed from their regular school for at least half a day for disciplinary purposes to another setting, such as their home or a behavior center. Removals are counted as an instance of out-of-school suspension regardless of whether educational services are provided. For simplicity, we use "out-of-school suspensions" and "suspensions" interchangeably in this report.

Suspension rate – The percentage of students, based on the student group population, who received at least one out-of-school suspension. It does not represent the number of suspensions overall. A student who is suspended multiple times is only counted once when calculating this rate.

Suspension gap – The difference in suspension rates between two groups. We discuss suspension gaps in two ways: in absolute percentage differences between the two groups (e.g., 5 percentage point gap) and the relative magnitude of one group's rate versus another (e.g., four times as likely to be suspended).

Secondary schools – Schools with any combination of grades 6–12 and without any lower grades.

Elementary schools – Schools with any combination of grades k–5 and without any grades above 7th grade.

K–12 schools – All elementary and secondary schools, and k–8 and k–12 schools.

Students with disabilities – Includes students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as required by the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) but does not include students receiving aids and services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Racial and ethnic groups – Different from the CRDC survey, this report uses "Latino/a" instead of "Hispanic or Latino of any race"; "Native American" instead of "American Indian or Alaska Native"; "Pacific Islander" instead of "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander"; and "Black" instead of "Black or African American."

National Trends in Out-of-School Suspension

In this section, we examine how suspension rates have changed over time, and we look at changes in racial gaps by school level and disability status. We find that national suspension rates increased from the 1970s to the early 2010s and then declined until 2017–18, the most recent data available. Despite the decline, substantial disparities in suspension rates remain. The suspension rates in this report are calculated using the unique count of students who were suspended and do not reflect the frequency or length of suspensions. It is important to note that many students are repeatedly suspended; of the 2.5 million students who received an out-of-school suspension in 2017–18, more than one third (37%) were suspended twice or more.[27]

Trends in Suspension Rates Over Time

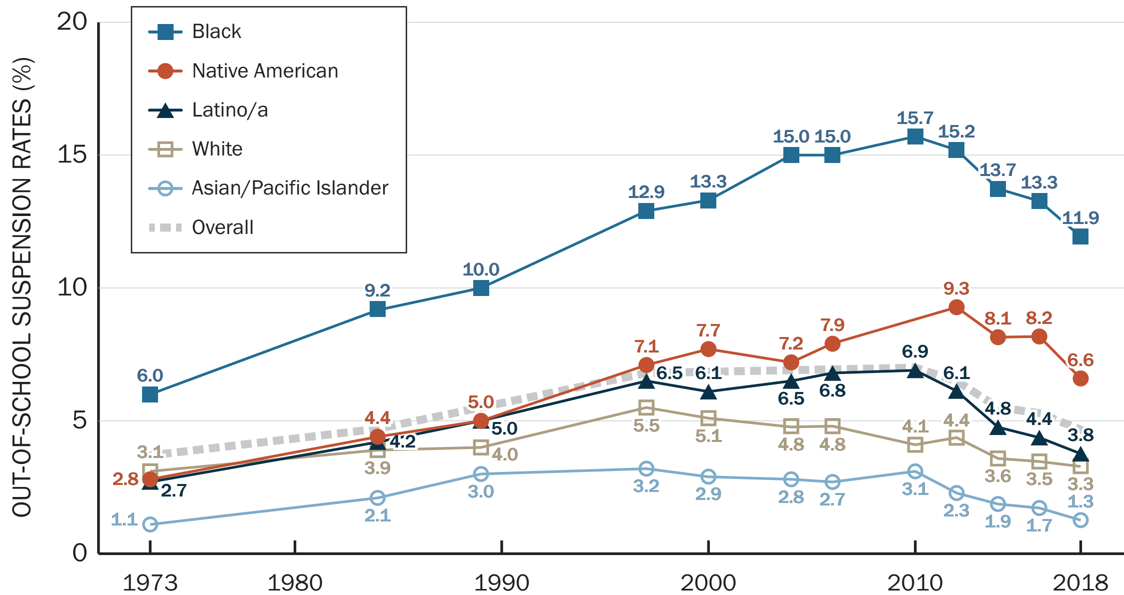
To understand how out-of-school suspension rates have changed for different groups of students, we examined suspension data for select years from the 1973 CRDC survey[28] to the most recent 2017–18 survey, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, disability status, and school level.

Figure 1 shows that from 1973 to the early 2010s, suspension rates increased for all student groups. The overall suspension rate increased from 4% in 1973 to 7% in the 2009–10 school year. Suspension of white and Asian students peaked around 1998, while suspension rates of other students continued to increase. Black and Native American students experienced the largest and most sustained increases in suspension among all groups, reaching a peak of 16% in the 2009–10 school year for Black students and 9% in 2011–12 for Native American students. Accordingly, racial disparities in suspension widened during this period. In 1973, the out-of-school suspension rate was 6% for Black students and about 3% for white students. By 2010, the 3 percentage point suspension gap had quadrupled to 12 percentage points (16% vs. 4%).

Black and Native American students experienced the largest and most sustained increases in suspension among all groups, reaching a peak of 16% in the 2009–10 school year for Black students and 9% in 2011–12 for Native American students.

Suspension rates for all students declined steadily from the early 2010s to 2017–18 but remained higher than what was observed in the 1970s and early 1980s. The overall suspension rate fell from 7% in 2009–10 to 5% in 2017–18. To see if the reduction in out-of-school suspensions signaled a genuine decrease in the use of exclusionary discipline overall or merely a switch from one form of exclusionary measure to another, we examined changes in the rates of in-school suspension from 2011–12 to 2017–18.[29] We found that the trend of in-school suspensions over the 6-year period mirrored the decrease in out-of-school suspensions, dropping from 7% to 5% over the 6-year period, signaling an overall reduction in the use of exclusionary discipline.

Figure 1
Trends in Out-of-School Suspension Rates in K–12 Schools, by Race and Ethnicity, 1973–2018



Notes: The years in the graph represent the spring of the school year the data was collected. To reduce cluttering, data labels for overall suspension rates were not included in the graph. The suspension rate for Native American students in the 2009–10 school year is not included due to data irregularities. We combined Asian and Pacific Islander students into one group for comparability with earlier data, which reported the two groups as one.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection. State and national estimations, 2000, 2004, 2006, and 2010; Losen, D. J., & Martinez, P. (2020). *Lost opportunities: How disparate school discipline continues to drive differences in the opportunity to learn.* Learning Policy Institute; Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project, UCLA; Verdugo, R. R. (2002). Race-ethnicity, social class, and zero-tolerance policies: The cultural and structural wars. *Education and Urban Society*, *35*(1), 50–55; Losen, D. J., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school.* Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project, UCLA.

While suspension rates for every racial group have decreased, disparities have persisted. Black students continue to be excluded from school at the highest rate, with more than 1 in 8 Black students (12%) receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions in 2017–18. This was 9 percentage points higher than the rate at which white students were suspended (3%) and nearly 11 percentage points higher than the suspension rate of Asian students (1.3%). Native American students had the second-highest suspension rate at 7%.

Racial Disparities in Suspension Rates by School Level and Disability Status Over Time

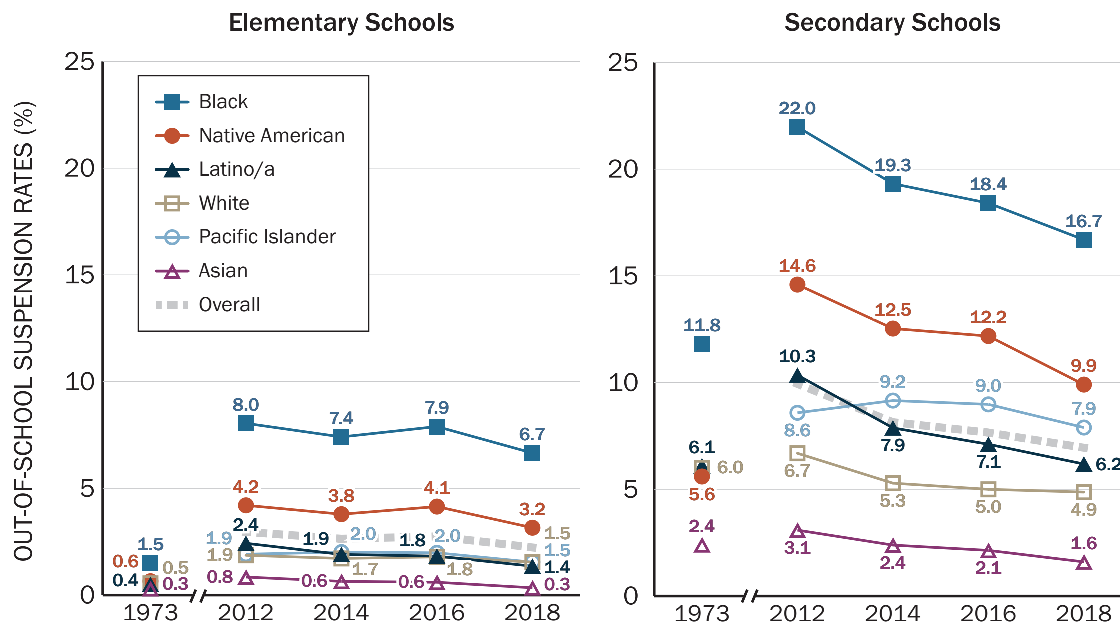
Students have intersecting identities that simultaneously influence their experiences in U.S. schools.[30] In the case of suspensions, we found that school level, race and ethnicity, and disability status together can substantially impact a student's risk of suspension.[31] For example, in 2017–18, 1 in 1,000 Asian girls not receiving special education services in elementary schools were suspended (0.1%). However, during that same school year, more than 1 in 4 Black boys

with disabilities (27%) in secondary schools were removed from classrooms and deprived of the opportunity to learn. Below, we explore these intersectional risks and whether they have changed over time.

Suspension rates by school level and race. As shown in Figure 2, the rate of suspension is higher in secondary school than in elementary school. In 2017–18, nearly 1 in 14 secondary school students (7%) were suspended, more than three times the rate of elementary school students (2%). In addition, while the suspension rates generally decreased from the early 2010s to 2017–18, the drop was concentrated in secondary schools; decreases at the elementary level were smaller and less consistent.

Substantial racial disparities persisted at both the elementary and secondary school levels over time. Black and Native American students have been disproportionately suspended in both elementary and secondary schools at least since the 2011–12 school year, the earliest year during which the CRDC data was collected from all public schools. In fact, in each year of data we analyzed, Black elementary students were more likely to be suspended than white secondary students.

Figure 2
Trends in Out-of-School Suspension Rates, by Race and Ethnicity and School Level, 1973, 2011–12 to 2017–18



Notes: The years in the graph represent the spring of the school year the data was collected. To reduce cluttering, data labels for overall suspension rates were not included in the graph. During the 2017–18 school year, the overall suspension rate was 6.9% for secondary school students and 2.2% for elementary school students.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, 2017–18; Losen, D. J., & Martinez, P. (2020). *Lost opportunities: How disparate school discipline continues to drive differences in the opportunity to learn.* Learning Policy Institute; Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project, UCLA.

Suspension gaps, as measured by percentage point difference in suspension rates, are larger in secondary schools than elementary schools. While the suspension rates of Latino/a, Pacific Islander, and white students were quite similar across the years in elementary schools, disparities emerge between these racial groups at the secondary school level, where Latino/a and Pacific Islander students were suspended at higher rates than white students. In addition, in 2017–18, the Black–white elementary suspension gap was 5 percentage points (7% vs. 2%), compared to a 12 percentage point difference between Black and white secondary students (17% vs. 5%).

Over time, the racial gaps in suspension rates have slightly reduced. Between 2011–12 and 2017–18, the Black–white gap among secondary students dropped from 15 percentage points to 12 percentage points, and the Latino/a–white gap in secondary schools dropped from almost 4 percentage points to just 1 percentage point. The suspension gap between Pacific Islander and white secondary school students was more variable, increasing from 2 percentage points in 2011–12 (9% vs. 7%) to 4 percentage points in 2014 and 2016, and then narrowing slightly to 3 percentage points in the 2017–18 school year (8% vs. 5%).

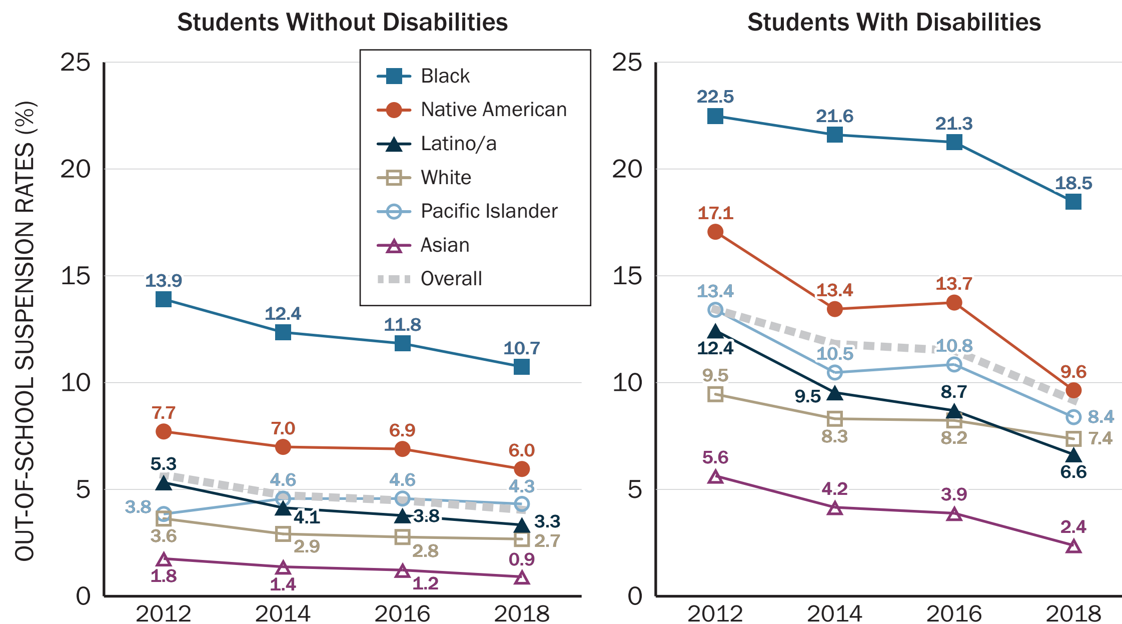
Racial disparities in suspension rates by disability status. Disability status is another factor associated with suspension rates; students with disabilities are much more likely than those without to be suspended. In 2017–18, almost 1 out of 11 students with disabilities (9%) were suspended, compared to 4% for students without disabilities. Suspensions may be particularly deleterious for students with disabilities because they rely on support services obtained through the school, such as academic supports, mental health services, speech therapy, and physical therapy. Indeed, lengthy out-of-school suspensions of students with disabilities can amount to a violation of federal law.

In 2017–18, almost 1 out of 11 students with disabilities (9%) were suspended, compared to 4% for students without disabilities. Suspensions may be particularly deleterious for students with disabilities because they rely on support services obtained through the school.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects all students with disabilities from discrimination. This protection includes ensuring they are not denied education because of behaviors caused by their disability.[32] In addition, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires educators to consider positive behavioral interventions and supports when the behavior of a student with a disability impedes their own or others' learning.[33] Since students with disabilities are suspended at much higher rates than students without disabilities, it is possible that educators may have been removing them from classrooms instead of providing sufficient behavioral supports and maintaining their right to a free appropriate public education.

In disaggregating suspension rates by students' race and ethnicity and disability status, we found that the suspension rates of students with disabilities dropped at a greater rate from 2011–12 to 2017–18 compared to other students. This is the case for students with disabilities in all racial and ethnic groups, as shown by the steeper slopes of the downward trend lines for students with disabilities in Figure 3. However, we also found that racial gaps were present among students both with and without disabilities, particularly for Black and Native American students, who tend to be suspended at higher rates compared to their white and Asian peers.

Figure 3
Trends in Out-of-School Suspension Rates of K–12 Students by Race and Ethnicity and Disability Status, 2011–12 to 2017–18



Notes: The years in the graph represent the spring of the school year the data was collected. To reduce cluttering, data labels for overall suspension rates were not included in the graph. During the 2017–18 school year, the overall suspension rate was 9.2% for students with disabilities and 4.0% for students without disabilities.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, 2017–18.

Figure 3 shows that Black students consistently have the highest risk of suspension, regardless of disability status. In the 2011–12 school year, more than 1 in 5 Black students (23%) with disabilities received one or more out-of-school suspensions and 1 out of every 7 Black students without disabilities were suspended (14%). Six years later, these high rates of suspension decreased, though they remained high. In 2017–18, nearly 1 in 5 Black students with disabilities (19%) were suspended and more than 1 in 10 Black students without disabilities (11%) were suspended.

The suspension gap between Black students and their peers in other racial and ethnic groups, regardless of their disability status, also saw little progress over the 6 years of data we analyzed. For example, in 2011–12, Black students with disabilities were suspended at 2.5 times the rate of white students with disabilities (23% vs. 10%), a 13 percentage point difference. By 2017–18, this disparity had only decreased slightly to 11 percentage points (19% vs. 7%) and Black students with disabilities were still suspended at 2.5 times the rate as their white counterparts. Similarly, the Black–white suspension gap for students without disabilities only saw a 2 percentage point decrease from 2011–12 (14% of Black students suspended vs. 4% of white students) to 2017–18 (11% vs. 3%), and Black students without disabilities remained about four times as likely as white students without disabilities to be suspended.

While suspension rates for Native American students were lower than for Black students, they were still removed from classrooms more frequently than their Pacific Islander, white, Latino/a, and Asian counterparts regardless of disability status. In 2011–12, more than 1 in 6 Native American students with disabilities (17%) were suspended, three times the rate of Asian students with disabilities (6%), an 11 percentage point difference. By 2017–18, the suspension rate of Native American students with disabilities had dropped to 10%, which was close to the national average suspension rate of 9%, but disparities remain—that same year, 2% of Asian students with disabilities were suspended, a quarter of the rate of Native American students.

We have shown that Black and Native American students, secondary school students, and students with disabilities are at high risk of being suspended, and that large disparities in suspension rates have persisted over time. However, exclusionary discipline is amenable to policy intervention, and recent data show that several states have reduced their suspension rates and suspension gaps. In the next part of this report, we discuss state-level changes in suspensions.

State-Level Trends in Out-of-School Suspension for Secondary Students

In this section, we describe the extent to which students in each state are being suspended and the progress that states have made in reducing suspension rates and gaps from 2011–12 to 2017–18. Because out-of-school suspensions have historically been concentrated at the secondary school level (see Figure 2), we focus our state-level analyses on secondary school students only.

Out-of-School Suspensions in the 2017–18 School Year

In the 2017–18 school year, the overall out-of-school suspension rate of secondary school students was 7%. While this is a decrease from prior years (see Figure 2), Figure 4 shows substantial state variation in suspension rates and that use of suspension remains high in many states. In Mississippi, South Carolina, and Washington, DC, more than 1 out of every 7 secondary school students (15%) received at least one out-of-school suspension in 2017–18. This is triple the rate at which students in California and Massachusetts were suspended (5%) and more than five times the rate of suspension in Utah (3%).

In Mississippi, South Carolina, and Washington, DC, more than 1 out of every 7 secondary school students (15%) received at least one out-of-school suspension in 2017–18.

Changes in Suspension Rates From 2011–12 to 2017–18

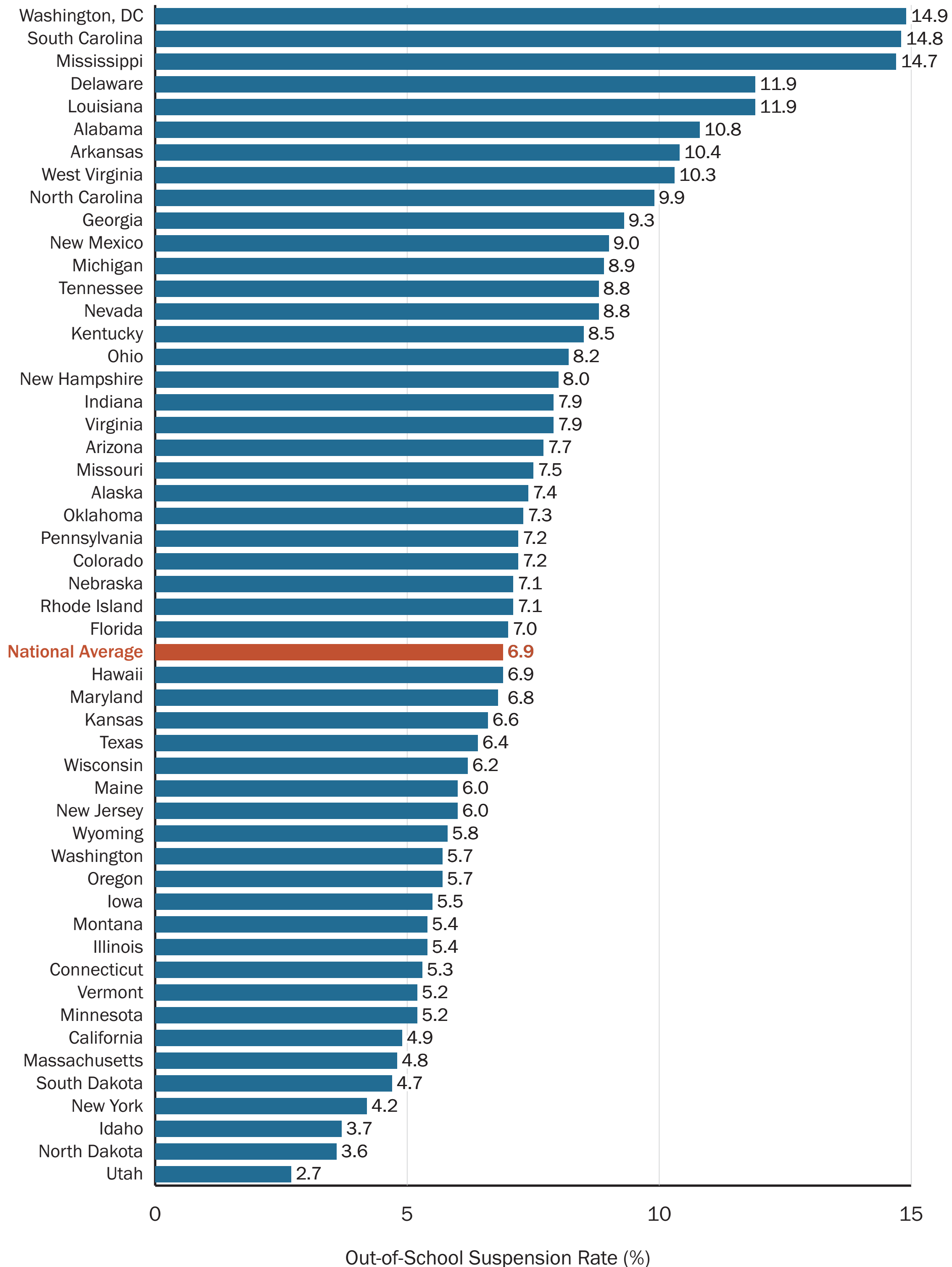
In comparing secondary school suspension rates across time in all 50 states and Washington, DC, we found that the use of out-of-school suspension decreased in 48 states and in Washington, DC, from 2011–12 to 2017–18 (see Appendix B, Table B1).

Table 1 shows the 10 states with suspension rates that were below the national average (7%) in 2017–18 and that had also shown the largest reductions in suspensions since 2011–12. These states include California, Illinois, and Massachusetts. Such states have made efforts to regulate suspending students for relatively minor and nonviolent offenses. For example, California and Illinois are among the nine states[34] that prohibit the out-of-school suspension of students for truancy or tardiness.[35]

Of all the states, only Hawaii and Kansas did not see a decrease in suspensions. In Hawaii, suspension rates increased from 3% in 2011–12 to 7% in 2017–18, while suspension rates in Kansas remained the same, at about 7%.

It is worth noting that these state-level findings mask variation at the district levels. Research has found that even in states in which suspension rates have been decreasing overall, several school districts are suspending students at increasing rates.[36] These increases can be large; in Richmond City, GA, for example, suspensions increased by 17 percentage points, from 12% in 2011–12 to 30% 2015–16, and in Trenton Public School District in New Jersey, suspensions rose 16 percentage points, from 3% in 2011–12 to 19% in 2015–16, a sixfold increase.[37]

Figure 4
States With the Highest and Lowest Out-of-School Suspension Rates in Secondary Schools, 2017–18



Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017–18.

Table 1
States With the Largest Decreases in Out-of-School Suspension Rates in Secondary Schools, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Average Annual Enrollment, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Out-of-School Suspension Rate, 2011–12 (%)	Out-of-School Suspension Rate, 2017–18 (%)	Change in Suspension Rates, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (Percentage Points)
Illinois	883,312	9.8	5.4	-4.4
California	2,852,723	8.9	4.9	-4.0
Massachusetts	422,665	8.3	4.8	-3.5
Vermont	31,205	8.5	5.2	-3.3
Oregon	268,953	8.9	5.7	-3.2
Maryland	417,187	9.7	6.8	-3.0
Washington	523,610	8.7	5.7	-3.0
Texas	2,412,610	8.9	6.4	-2.5
Idaho	133,100	5.8	3.7	-2.2
Wisconsin	385,063	8.2	6.2	-2.0

Note: Only states with suspension rates in 2017–18 that were below the national average (6.9%) are included in this table.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

To see if schools may have replaced out-of-school suspension with in-school suspension, another form of discipline that removes students from the classroom, we compared states' change in out-of-school suspension rates and in-school suspension rates. We found that in Colorado, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Wyoming, in-school suspensions increased at a rate that was greater than the decrease in out-of-school suspensions. This suggests that even though out-of-school suspension rates were decreasing in these states, more students were being taken out of classrooms through in-school suspension.

State-level policies can be enacted to support the reduction of out-of-school suspension rates without increasing other forms of exclusionary discipline. For example, Massachusetts requires schools to first use alternative forms of discipline, such as mediation, restorative justice, and behavioral intervention and supports, before considering out-of-school suspension as a last resort. In addition, regardless of the level of offense, schools in Massachusetts must provide alternative education services to suspended students, such as tutoring or distance learning.[38] California has adopted multiple policies that limit the use of out-of-school suspensions for minor offenses and encourage alternatives to exclusionary discipline. (See "California Policies and Practices Aimed at Reducing Exclusionary Discipline.")

California Policies and Practices Aimed at Reducing Exclusionary Discipline

California has put in significant effort to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline. To lower suspension rates and incentivize the improvement of school climate and student engagement, California included school climate as one if its eight funding priorities in its Local Control Funding Formula, which was enacted in 2013, and included suspension rates in its statewide accountability and improvement system. Later, under the Every Student Succeeds Act, passed in 2015, California was one of three states that included suspension rates in its federally required accountability system as well.

With the signing of Assembly Bill 420 in 2014, California became one of the first states in the nation to ban suspensions and expulsions of students in grades k–3 for minor misbehaviors such as disruptive conduct and willful defiance. The 5-year bill was made permanent for grades k–3 in 2019 by Governor Gavin Newsom when he signed State Bill 419, which also expanded the prohibition to cover students in grades 4–5 starting in the 2019–20 academic year. The bill also prohibits suspensions and expulsions for disruptive behavior and willful defiance for grades 6–8 until 2025.

Local efforts preceded these state policies. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the largest district in the state, began implementing schoolwide positive behavior intervention support in the 2006–07 school year. In 2011–12, it prohibited suspending students for willful defiance. Three years later, in the 2014–15 school year, the district rolled out a restorative justice plan. Through this plan, the district selected schools—based on student demographics and past suspension rates—to receive training on building a sense of community in schools, repairing harm between students and teachers, and reintegrating students who have been suspended. Research has found that the LAUSD saw large declines in suspensions following the district's ban, as well as reduced suspension gaps. Schools in which educators received restorative justice training saw some of the largest reductions in suspensions.

California has also supported educators in reducing the need for suspensions by using more effective practices. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing updated licensing standards for teachers and administrators to include competencies in teaching social and emotional skills and in using restorative practices to manage classrooms. The California Department of Education also organized workshops and distributed multiple years of funding for professional development focused on alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices that promote respect and help students understand the nature and consequences of their actions.

As a result of these efforts, California has seen a consistent decrease in suspension rates since 2011–12. In 2017–18, California had the seventh-lowest out-of-school suspension rates in the nation (Figure 4) and was one of the states that had made the most progress in reducing the suspension gap between students with and without disabilities (Table 5). In addition, California saw an 80% decline in suspensions for disruption or defiance, from 4.1% in 2012–13 to 0.8% in 2018–19. Research has also found that California students with more exposure to restorative practices were less likely to be subject to exclusionary discipline, saw smaller racial disparities in exclusionary discipline, and showed better academic achievement.

California is continuing to expand on these efforts. In the 2021–22 fiscal year, California allocated $1.5 billion for its Educator Effectiveness program, which local education agencies can use to fund teacher training on implementing social and emotional learning, using trauma-informed practices, and increasing student access to mental health services. The program also funds professional development for educators on practices to create a positive school climate, including restorative justice, training around implicit biases, multi-tiered systems of support, and transforming the school culture to one that values students from diverse backgrounds.

Sources: Kostyo, S., Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2018). *Making ESSA's equity promise real: State strategies to close the opportunity gap: Reducing student suspension rates* [Research brief]; Hashim, A. K., Strunk, K. O., & Dhaliwal, T. K. (2018). Justice for all? Suspension bans and restorative justice programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *93*(2), 174–189; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2016, July 8). Adoption of Revised California Teaching Performance Expectations; Losen, D. J., & Martinez, P. (2020). *Is California doing enough to close the school discipline gap?* Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project, UCLA; Darling-Hammond, S., Trout, S., Fronius, T., & Cerna, R. (2021). *Can restorative practices bridge racial disparities in schools? Evidence from the California Healthy Kids Survey*. WestEd.

Changes in Racial Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools From 2011–12 to 2017–18

In addition to reducing suspensions overall, several states have made significant headway in reducing disparities in suspension rates between 2011–12 and 2017–18. In this section, we discuss the changes in suspension gaps between Black, Native American, and Latino/a secondary school students as compared to their white peers. While Asian students are suspended at lower rates than white students, we chose white students as the reference group for comparison because of their larger population size in most states and because white students have historically been privileged in accessing opportunities to learn. Finally, although we do not discuss in detail the Pacific Islander–white suspension gap due to the small population of Pacific Islander students in a number of states, we include state-level enrollment and suspension data on Pacific Islander students in Appendix B, Table B5.

Changes in Black–white suspension gaps

In 45 states and Washington, DC, the Black–white out-of-school suspension gap among secondary students narrowed between 2011–12 and 2017–18 (see Appendix B, Table B2). Table 2 lists the 10 states that achieved the largest decreases in Black–white suspension gaps over the 6-year period. We did not include states that suspended Black students at a rate above the national average. Of these states, Rhode Island had the largest decrease in the Black–white suspension gap, from 15 percentage points in 2011–12 to 6 percentage points in 2017–18, with the suspension rates of Black students dropping from 26% to 12% over the 6-year period. Rhode Island's progress may be due in part to a law that the state passed in 2016, which requires districts to analyze their discipline data each year and to look for disparities in suspension rates based on race, ethnicity, or disability status. When a disparity is identified, the district must submit an action plan to address it.[39]

It is worth noting that although the Black–white suspension gap narrowed in Hawaii, the suspension rate of Black students actually increased, indicating that the gap was narrowed not because fewer Black students were suspended but because more white students were suspended. The suspension rate of Black students in Hawaii increased 2 percentage points, from 5% in 2011–12 to 7% in 2017–18, while suspensions of white students increased 3 percentage points, from 3% to 6%.

In addition, suspension rates of Black secondary students are still very high in many of the states highlighted in Table 2. More than 1 in 7 Black students received one or more suspensions in Illinois (16%) in 2017–18, and 1 out of 8 Black students were suspended in Florida (13%), much higher than the national suspension rate of secondary school students (7%). Out of the 10 states listed in Table 2, only Idaho and Utah were suspending Black students at similar rates as the overall national average in 2017–18, and these states had relatively low enrollments of Black students in their secondary schools.

We also found an increase in Black–white suspension gaps from 2011–12 to 2017–18 in five states: Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, North Dakota, and South Carolina. These states generally have high rates of Black student enrollment and high suspension rates of Black students. For example, South Carolina has about 123,000 Black students enrolled, accounting for 35% of secondary school students in the state. In 2017–18, more than 1 in 4 (26%) of South Carolina's Black secondary school students were suspended at least once, nearly triple the rate of their white peers (9%). This 17 percentage point Black–white gap was even higher than the gap observed in 2011–12, when it was just under 16 percentage points. South Carolina's school discipline policies may be contributing to its high rates of suspension and large suspension gaps. The state permits suspensions and expulsions of students for "any crime, gross immorality, gross misbehavior, persistent disobedience, or for violation or written rules and promulgated regulations," which creates many opportunities for educators to issue exclusionary punishments.[40]

Table 2
States With the Largest Decreases in Black–White Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Black Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Black Students Enrolled, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Black Students (%)		Black–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)		
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18	Change, 2011–12 to 2017–18
Rhode Island	5,510	8.6	26.1	11.7	15.1	6.4	-8.7
Oregon	6,335	2.4	21.7	11.9	14.3	6.6	-7.7
Florida	286,647	22.3	26.4	12.8	14.6	7.1	-7.5
Utah	3,758	1.4	14.6	7.1	11.1	5.0	-6.1
Illinois	135,707	15.4	24.3	15.7	18.5	12.6	-5.9
New Mexico	3,356	2.1	21.8	14.2	13.1	7.4	-5.7
Idaho	1,631	1.2	13.4	6.6	8.4	3.3	-5.1
California	178,188	6.2	20.5	12.7	13.3	8.7	-4.6
Wyoming	551	1.3	16.5	11.3	10.8	6.2	-4.6
Maine	2,650	3.4	14.6	9.4	7.6	3.5	-4.1

Note: Only states with suspension rates of Black secondary school students that were below the national average in 2017–18 (16.7%) are included in this table.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12 and 2017–18.

Changes in Native American–white suspension gaps

In 45 states, out-of-school suspension gaps between Native American and white secondary school students narrowed from 2011–12 to 2017–18 (see Appendix B, Table B3).[41] Table 3 shows the 10 states that made the greatest reduction in the Native American–white suspension gap and suspended Native American students at rates below the national average of 10% in 2017–18. Of these states, Massachusetts had the largest decrease in the Native American–white suspension gap, from 11 percentage points in 2011–12 to 3 percentage points in 2017–18, with the suspension rate of Native American students dropping from 17% to under 7%, which is on par with the overall national average in 2017–18. Illinois also saw large decreases in the Native American–white suspension gap, from 9 percentage points in 2011–12 to 2 percentage points in 2017–18. The suspension rate of Native American students in the state (5%) was also among the lowest in the nation in 2017–18.

It is important to note that many of the states highlighted in Table 3 have low enrollments of Native American students. Out of the 10 states, only California and New Mexico have a Native American student enrollment that is above the national average. In both of these states, the suspension rate of Native American students declined noticeably, from 17% and 15%, respectively, to 9% in 2017–18; however, this rate remains higher than the suspension rate of secondary school students overall (7%).

We also found that the Native American–white suspension gap increased slightly in several states, including Alaska, Arkansas, and Mississippi.[42] In Alaska, which enrolled nearly 7,900 Native American students per year from 2011–12 to 2017–18, accounting for about 16% of its secondary school student population, 1 out of 10 Native American students were suspended (10%) in 2017–18, compared to under 6% of white students. This 4 percentage point difference was 1 point lower in 2011–12, when 10% of Native American students and 7% of white students were suspended.

We also found that the Native American–white suspension gap increased slightly in several states, including Alaska, Arkansas, and Mississippi.

Table 3
States With the Largest Decreases in Native American–White Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Native American Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Native American Students Enrolled, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Native American Students (%)		Native American–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)		
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18	Change, 2011–12 to 2017–18
Massachusetts	1,207	0.3	16.8	6.5	11.0	3.3	-7.7
Illinois	2,815	0.3	14.3	4.8	8.5	1.7	-6.8
Virginia	2,176	0.3	15.1	6.7	7.8	1.5	-6.3
Maryland	1,312	0.3	15.6	7.3	9.3	3.2	-6.1
Maine	617	0.8	12.8	6.2	5.8	0.3	-5.5
Indiana	1,455	0.3	13.8	6.2	5.8	0.4	-5.4
Missouri	2,089	0.5	14.1	7.2	7.2	2.0	-5.2
California	19,231	0.7	17.2	9.2	10.1	5.2	-4.9
New Mexico	16,885	10.7	15.4	9.2	6.7	2.5	-4.2
Georgia	2,115	0.2	13.6	7.8	6.8	2.8	-4.0

Note: Only states with suspension rates of Native American secondary school students that were below the national average in 2017–18 (9.9%) and states with an average of at least 500 Native American secondary school students enrolled are included in this table.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12 and 2017–18.

Changes in Latino/a–white suspension gaps

In 47 states and Washington, DC, suspension rates of Latino/a secondary students declined between 2011–12 and 2017–18. The declines ranged between 0.7 percentage points in New York to 13 percentage points in Rhode Island, contributing to a reduction in the Latino/a–white suspension gap in these states (see Appendix B, Table B4). Table 4 shows the 10 states with below-average suspension rates for Latino/a secondary school students in 2017–18 that made the most progress in decreasing the Latino/a–white suspension gaps over the 6-year period. Florida and Vermont were the states with the largest narrowing of the suspension gap, with decreases of about 6 percentage points from 2011–12 to 2017–18. This is particularly noteworthy in Florida, where 30% of students are Latino/a and their suspension rate decreased from 16% to 5% over this time. However, news reports have raised questions about whether suspensions were being underreported or masked as absences in some parts of the state.[43]

The 10 states listed in Table 4 all had suspension rates of Latino/a students that were below the overall national average secondary school suspension rate of 7%. Although this is encouraging, suspensions of Latino/a students remained high in several states in 2017–18, including Pennsylvania (12%), where more than 68,000 secondary school Latino/a students were enrolled annually in recent years, and Ohio (10%), which enrolled nearly 31,000 Latino/a students.

We also found that the Latino/a–white suspension gap increased in a few states, including Arkansas, Hawaii, and New Hampshire. In New Hampshire and Arkansas, not only did suspension gaps increase between 2011–12 and 2017–18, but suspension rates of Latino/a students also remained high, with 16% and 12% of Latino/a students suspended in New Hampshire and Arkansas, respectively.

Table 4
States With the Largest Decreases in Latino/a–White Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Latino/a Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Latino/a Students Enrolled, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Latino/a Students (%)		Latino/a–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)		
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18	Change, 2011–12 to 2017–18
Vermont	510	1.6	11.9	2.8	3.5	-2.5	-6.0
Florida	388,050	30.2	16.7	5.1	4.9	-0.6	-5.5
Iowa	20,915	9.2	11.5	5.9	6.7	1.8	-4.9
Missouri	21,010	5.0	12.5	6.1	5.6	0.9	-4.7
Washington, DC	3,281	13.5	12.8	6.1	8.3	4.6	-3.7
Illinois	200,342	22.7	10.6	4.7	4.9	1.6	-3.3
Oregon	58,173	21.6	11.4	6.2	3.9	0.8	-3.1
Georgia	109,917	12.9	11.0	6.4	4.2	1.5	-2.7
North Dakota	1,802	3.7	6.8	4.3	4.2	1.7	-2.5
Utah	42,291	15.8	7.9	4.5	4.4	2.4	-2.0

Note: Only states with suspension rates of Native American secondary school students that were below the national average in 2017–18 (6.2%) are included in this table.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12 and 2017–18.

Changes in Suspension Gaps Between Students With and Without Disabilities in Secondary Schools From 2011–12 to 2017–18

Besides narrowing racial disparities in suspension, many states have also reduced the suspension gap between secondary school students with and without disabilities. In 47 states and Washington, DC, the suspension rates of secondary students with disabilities decreased from 2011–12 to 2017–18, with declines ranging from 2 to 21 percentage points.[44] These declines contributed to a narrowing of the disabled–nondisabled suspension gap in 46 states and Washington, DC, from

2011–12 to 2017–18 (see Appendix B, Table B6). Table 5 lists the 10 states with below-average suspension rates of students with disabilities in 2017–18 that had also achieved the largest decreases in suspension gaps compared to 2011–12. Of these states, Montana narrowed its disabled–nondisabled suspension gap the most, from 11 percentage points to 4 percentage points over the 6-year period. The suspension rate of students with disabilities also decreased by half, from 18% in 2011–12 to 9% in 2017–18. While this number is still above the overall suspension rate of secondary students (7%), it is among the lowest in the country, after Utah (6%), North Dakota (7%), New York (8%), and Idaho (9%).

Despite progress in most states, we found that in four states—Arkansas, Delaware, North Dakota, and West Virginia—the suspension gap between students with and without disabilities had increased. In West Virginia, the suspension gap increased by 4 percentage points from 2011–12 to 2017–18; while suspension rates of typically developing students decreased from 13% to 9% during this period, the state made no progress in reducing suspension of students with disabilities. In both 2011–12 and 2017–18, almost 1 in 5 students with disabilities (19%) were suspended at least once.

It is important to note that several states and Washington, DC, continue to suspend students with disabilities at extremely high rates, even though these places have made progress in reducing suspension gaps. For example, about 1 in 4 students with disabilities were suspended in Delaware (25%), Louisiana (25%), South Carolina (25%), and Washington, DC (24%).

Table 5
States With the Largest Decreases in Suspension Gaps Between Students With and Without Disabilities in Secondary Schools, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Students With Disabilities, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Students With Disabilities Enrolled, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Students With Disabilities (%)		Disabled–Nondisabled Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)		
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18	Change, 2011–12 to 2017–18
Montana	7,035	11.4	17.6	9.1	11.1	4.2	-6.9
Arizona	45,687	10.8	19.4	12.0	10.8	4.7	-6.1
California	294,019	10.5	18.9	10.0	11.0	5.8	-5.2
Tennessee	51,008	12.3	19.6	11.5	7.9	3.0	-4.9
Minnesota	53,383	13.5	16.2	11.4	11.8	7.3	-4.5
South Dakota	6,371	10.9	16.4	10.3	10.5	6.3	-4.2
Oregon	33,540	12.6	18.3	11.6	10.7	6.8	-3.9
Massachusetts	68,294	16.3	16.5	9.9	9.7	6.1	-3.6
Connecticut	31,093	12.6	16.6	12.1	11.1	7.9	-3.2
Vermont	4,413	14.5	18.4	12.9	12.3	9.1	-3.2

Note: Only states with suspension rates of secondary school students with disabilities that were below the national average in 2017–18 (13.3%) are included in this table.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12 and 2017–18.

What Influences the Use of Suspensions in Schools?

The trends in suspension rates at the national and state levels and the disparate use of suspension with different groups of students are a result of discipline policies and a set of school-level factors. These factors influence the consideration of which behaviors are a rule violation and educators' response to student behavior. Below we describe the major policies that have influenced schools' use of suspension over the past several decades and how within-school factors and resource allocation relate to educators' utilization of suspension.

Discipline Policies

Policies at the federal, state, and local levels can influence educators' use of exclusionary discipline by requiring or restricting circumstances under which educators suspend or expel students. Below, we describe the two major types of discipline policies that are associated with an increase (zero-tolerance policies) and decrease (restorative practices) in exclusionary discipline rates and efforts federal, state, and local policymakers have taken to transition away from zero-tolerance policies toward restorative practices.

Zero-tolerance policies

The use of exclusionary discipline in schools—and its disparate impact by race—has a long-standing history in the United States.[45] School administrators began to use out-of-school suspensions and expulsions as measures to deal with student misbehavior in the 1960s and early 1970s as school enrollments boomed.[46] The rates of suspension increased substantially between 1970 and 2010, with particularly sharp increases in the mid-1980s through the 1990s, particularly for Black students.[47] These increases coincided with federal actions during the Reagan administration, which drastically reduced social spending and promulgated tighter security and tough rule enforcement in schools.[48] Reagan's war on drugs and other policing initiatives also led to increased stigmatization of Black youth and the rise of zero-tolerance policies, which mandate harsh punishments for violations of particular school rules, regardless of the severity of infraction or situational context.[49]

Zero-tolerance policies are based on the "broken-windows" theory used in policing, which stipulates that strict enforcement of minor crimes would send a deterrent message and prevent more serious and violent crimes. Such policies were adopted in educational settings in the early 1990s to respond to drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity in schools.[50] In 1994, the Clinton administration formally incorporated school-based zero tolerance into federal law by signing the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), which mandates a 1-year expulsion for any student found to have possessed a weapon on school grounds and requires school districts to refer law-offending students to the criminal or juvenile justice system.[51] The requirement for referrals positioned law enforcement as first responders to student infractions and increased school administrators' accountability for reducing school crime, violence, and misbehavior.[52]

President Clinton also started the COPS in Schools Program in 1998, injecting more than $800 million for hiring and training school police.[53] A quasi-experimental study analyzing data on 2.5 million students in Texas from 1999 to 2008 found that middle schools that received COPS grants increased their disciplinary actions by 6%. The increase in disciplinary actions in middle schools was driven by sanctions for minor infractions of school code and conduct violations, with

Black middle school students experiencing the largest increases in discipline. While disciplinary rates did not change in grant-receiving high schools, receipt of the COPS grant was associated with a 2.5% decrease in high school graduation rates.[54]

As a result of these federal funds, schools and the juvenile justice system began to collaborate closely, with incidents previously resolved internally by educators increasingly referred to school police and then to municipal police. This led to the criminalization of disorderly conduct, with students as young as age 6 receiving misdemeanor tickets for minor misbehaviors.[55] After the passage of the GFSA, zero-tolerance policies became the norm in public schools. A 1998 report found that 94% of schools in the country had implemented at least some component of zero-tolerance policies.[56] The No Child Left Behind Act, passed by the George W. Bush administration in 2002, further incentivized states to adopt a zero-tolerance policy for "violent or persistently disruptive students."[57]

While zero tolerance was originally intended to keep schools safe, research has found that the scope of zero-tolerance policies expanded beyond firearms and illegal drugs to include nonviolent misbehavior such as tardiness and disrespect.[58] Research and news media have documented numerous students being suspended or expelled for minor infractions, including pointing a gun drawn on paper at classmates or bringing a plastic axe to school as part of a Halloween costume.[59] Even in Washington, DC, which prohibits out-of-school suspension of students for minor infractions such as truancy, tardiness, and dress code violations, 55% of out-of-school suspensions and 72% of in-school suspensions issued in 2018–19 were for nonviolent incidents.[60]

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In addition to contributing to an increase in the overall rate of suspensions, implementation of zero-tolerance policies is linked with increased racial disparities in suspension rates. Nationwide, the Black–white suspension gap increased from 6 percentage points to 12 percentage points from 1990 to 2010. A study of a midsize urban school district found that when the district expanded zero-tolerance policies, the suspension rate remained largely unchanged for white students but increased for Black students, widening the Black–white suspension gap by 30%.[61] Scholars have argued that zero-tolerance approaches to school discipline exclude students who are most in need of education, violate students' right to due process, and absolve schools of their responsibility to provide a nurturing and caring environment in which all students can learn.[62]

Restorative discipline policy

A growing body of research has found that the comprehensive use of restorative practices is central to addressing the root causes of student misbehavior and reducing schools' reliance on exclusionary discipline.[63] Restorative practices comprise a proactive, relationship-centered approach to building a positive school climate and addressing student behavior. Such practices focus on belonging over exclusions, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment.[64] Restorative practices are closely integrated with social and emotional learning, as students are encouraged to acknowledge and manage their emotions, develop empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and handle challenges effectively.[65] One example of restorative practices

is restorative conferences, where a trained facilitator brings together the victim, the offender, and members of the school community to guide them through reflective questions and develop a consensus to repair harm.[66] Such practices are based on the science of learning and development, which indicates that "students will be most inclined to demonstrate positive behavior when their school climates and relationships inspire feelings of trust, safety, and belonging."[67]

Many studies have found restorative practices to be effective in reducing the use of exclusionary discipline and narrowing disparities; improving school climate, student behavior, and school attendance; and reducing absenteeism.[68] For example, a randomized controlled trial conducted in 44 Pittsburgh, PA, middle schools (half of which implemented schoolwide restorative practices) found that teachers in schools that implemented restorative practices (treatment schools) had improved perceptions of school climate, working conditions, and school leadership. Days of instruction lost to suspensions in treatment schools were also lower by 16%, and there was a small but notable reduction in the racial discipline gap.[69] A study that surveyed high school students found that teachers who implemented restorative practices in classrooms issued fewer exclusionary discipline referrals, especially for Black and Latino/a students, and had more positive relationships with students from diverse backgrounds.[70] While evidence of impact on students' education achievement and attainment is mixed, restorative practices set positive conditions for learning through improved school climate and increased attendance.[71] Mixed evidence may be due to lack of implementation of the restorative practices within a program. A recent large-scale study in California examined the impact of exposure to restorative practices and found that increased exposure to restorative practices resulted in multiple benefits for students, including higher achievement in mathematics and English language arts, lower rates of suspension, and improved student mental health, with particularly strong benefits for Black students.[72]

Transitioning from a culture of punishment to a restorative paradigm can reasonably take 3–5 years.[73] School and district leaders should acknowledge that transitioning to restorative approaches may involve growing pains and temporary setbacks before schools see long-term gains,[74] and they should commit to supporting multiple years of implementation while adjusting accountability measures to increase buy-in and decrease teacher turnover, two barriers to successfully incorporating restorative practices in classrooms.[75]

Efforts to reduce exclusionary discipline

Just as zero-tolerance policies are associated with increases in suspension rates and suspension gaps, efforts to eliminate zero-tolerance policies and replace exclusionary discipline with supportive practices are associated with decreases in suspension rates and suspension gaps. These policy changes have been advanced at the federal, state, and local levels.

Federal efforts. Soon after President Obama took office in 2009, the administration, recognizing the federal government's role in protecting students' civil rights and addressing educational inequities, began to focus on reforming school discipline. In 2011, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice launched the Support School Discipline Initiative. The goal was to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline in schools by developing consensus-based recommendations and investing in research and data collection.[76] Under the initiative, the Council of State Governments was commissioned to work with a multidisciplinary advisory group of more than 100 members to develop the 2014 School Discipline Consensus Report. The report includes recommendations on managing student behavior; examples of implementation; and tools that states, districts,

and schools can use to reduce schools' reliance on exclusionary discipline. The report's guidance centered on building a positive school climate through restorative practices; providing tiered levels of behavioral interventions; and maintaining close collaboration between education, police, and court officials.[77]

In 2014, the Department of Education issued a guidance package on civil rights and school discipline. The guidance provided information to support states, districts, and schools in their efforts to move away from zero-tolerance policies and toward research-based, restorative practices. It noted that racial and other disparities in exclusionary discipline could lead to a federal investigation into whether a district had violated civil rights laws, regardless of whether the disparities were caused by discriminatory practices or by the disparate impacts of a neutral school discipline policy on students.[78] The guidance package included four educative components:

1. A "Dear Colleague" guidance letter on civil rights and discipline describing how, under federal law, schools can meet their legal obligations to administer student discipline without discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, or national origin. The letter includes information and examples for schools regarding how to determine the existence of intentional discrimination and disparate impact and identify the appropriate remedies.

2. Research-based "Guiding Principles" describing actions states and districts can take to improve school climate and school discipline, including alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices.

3. A "Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources," including sample memorandums of understanding, discipline policies, and surveys.

4. A "Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations" cataloging the school discipline laws and regulations in each state.

In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a new iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In contrast to the No Child Left Behind Act, which incentivized states to adopt zero-tolerance policies,[79] ESSA encouraged states to include school climate indicators such as suspension and expulsion rates as part of their accountability systems, which could create incentives for schools to transition away from exclusionary discipline.[80] Currently, California, Rhode Island, and West Virginia include exclusionary discipline rates in their state accountability systems. ESSA also required data on suspensions, expulsions, and school-related arrests to be included in report cards for states and local education agencies.[81]

However, in 2018, the Trump administration rescinded the guidance on school discipline and all of its supporting documents.[82] While the recission did not change existing laws, it removed resources for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students and for addressing a range of actions that reinforce inequities in school.[83]

In July 2022, the Biden administration released a new guidance package on avoiding discrimination when disciplining students with disabilities.[84] The guidance emphasizes that providing the required individualized services and supports to students with disabilities could reduce disability-related behaviors that could lead to disciplinary actions, and encourages districts to utilize funding from the American Rescue Plan to hire additional staff and provide professional development for

educators. It also made clear that schools should modify discipline policies to avoid penalizing students for behaviors that resulted from their disability. The package is composed of a series of letters and resources, including:

- a guide titled “Supporting Students With Disabilities and Avoiding the Discriminatory Use of Student Discipline under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973”;[85]
- a Q&A document that outlines the legal requirements related to behavior support and discipline for students with disabilities under IDEA;[86] and
- a guide titled “Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children With Disabilities” that includes information about evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline that could help states, districts, and schools meet IDEA requirements and improve outcomes for students with disabilities, including restorative practices and investing in school and educator capacity.[87]

State policies. Over the past decade, a growing number of states have been amending zero-tolerance policies and limiting exclusionary discipline. As of May 2021, at least 15 states and Washington, DC, have placed limitations on the use of exclusionary discipline in schools, and at least 37 states and Washington, DC, encourage the use of nonpunitive alternatives to suspensions.[88] Additionally, at least 22 states and Washington, DC, have requirements for reporting and disaggregating exclusionary data to highlight disparities.[89]

A few states have combined revised discipline policies with sets of supports. For example, since 2016, Massachusetts has identified schools with high suspension rates or large disparities in suspension and requires them to participate in a professional learning network to improve their school climate.[90] Indiana passed a bill in 2018 that requires the state department of education to survey school discipline policies and determine the extent to which positive discipline and restorative justice practices are used.[91] It is also required to ensure that educators have access to the support and training they need to implement restorative practices.[92] Several states, including California, have leveraged their accountability systems to hold schools accountable for improving school climate and have allocated funds for professional development and support to do so. As described earlier, along with legislation limiting the use of suspensions, California saw major declines in suspensions as well as reduction in suspension gaps.

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Local policies. Even before federal efforts to curb exclusionary discipline were launched during the Obama administration, a number of districts pushed for discipline reform. For example, in 2008, in response to parents and youth advocacy, Denver Public Schools ended its zero-tolerance discipline policies and began implementing restorative practices.[93] Between 2006 and 2013, the overall suspension rate in Denver declined from 11% to 6%, and the suspension gap between Black and white students narrowed from 12 to 8 percentage points.[94] Another example is Oakland Unified School District in California, which piloted a restorative justice program at a middle school in

2005. By 2014, the district was running similar programs in 24 schools. From 2011–12 to 2013–14, suspension rates at district schools running whole-school restorative justice programs decreased from 24% to 14% and graduation rates increased from 45% to 72%.[95]

School Factors Influencing Use of Suspension

A growing body of research shows that the rates of exclusionary punishments and discipline disparities are mainly attributable to certain factors within the school.[96] These factors, which are often the result of policy decisions at the federal, state, local, and school levels, include educator implicit bias, teacher preparation and working conditions, and school leadership.

Educator implicit bias

Implicit bias refers to the automatic and unconscious stereotypes that drive a person's behavior and decision-making.[97] It helps explain why Black students receive more frequent and longer suspensions than white students for the same behavior, and why the largest racial disparities are found in suspensions for subjective infractions, such as defiance, instead of more objective offenses, such as possession of weapons.[98] An example of how implicit bias manifests was illustrated in a 2016 study in which preschool teachers were asked to monitor classroom footage for student misbehavior. Although there was no misbehavior occurring, the study found that teachers scrutinized Black boys more carefully than students of other demographic profiles.[99] The study's author noted that if all students misbehaved at equal rates, yet teachers watch one racial or gender group more closely than others with expectations of seeing misbehavior, they will identify more misbehavior from that group and in turn take more frequent disciplinary actions.[100]

In another experimental study, researchers showed teachers the same school record of a student, changing the student's name to be either stereotypically Black or white. The more likely a teacher was to think the student was Black, the more likely they were to label the student a troublemaker and to issue more severe disciplinary actions in response to scenarios about the student.[101] Studies have also found that educators show more attitudes of concern, indifference, or rejection toward students with disabilities and view them as a threat.[102] In contrast, teachers who are able to develop more empathetic mindsets are more likely to consider contextual factors that affect a student's misconduct, reducing their implicit bias when disciplining students.[103]

Teacher preparation

Teacher preparation also influences use of suspension. A survey of 1,000 public school teachers found that many teachers continued to perceive in-school suspensions (47%), out-of-school suspensions (39%), and expulsions (40%) as effective discipline strategies.[104] Exclusionary discipline is the only tool many teachers are familiar with, and they are reluctant to part with it.[105] Another recent survey found that many school staff, including behavior analysts, felt ill-prepared or uncomfortable to implement interventions to decrease racism in schools.[106]

Well-prepared teachers who can engage students with a rigorous curriculum; build strong, trusting relationships; mediate conflict; and effectively manage classrooms are less likely to use exclusionary discipline.[107] Teachers with high social and emotional competence are equipped to consider multiple perspectives and resolve disputes in a culturally responsive manner and are thus

able to defuse or prevent conflicts with students that otherwise may have resulted in disciplinary action.[108] Conversely, when students view teachers as untrustworthy, they are more likely to be uncooperative in the classroom.[109]

At the school level, research has found that having a high percentage of inexperienced teachers in a school is associated with higher rates of suspensions.[110] Because students of color and students with disabilities have less access to well-qualified teachers, this may contribute to higher suspension rates of these students.[111] In addition, many general education teachers are not well equipped to handle certain behavioral issues of students with disabilities.[112]

School leadership

Principals are instrumental in building a positive school climate, supporting teachers, and leading schoolwide school discipline reform.[113] School administrators play a critical role in addressing disproportionate exclusionary discipline, as they hold the authority to classify the severity of a misconduct and issue a consequence for the student.[114] Studies have found that principals who support zero-tolerance policies are more likely to remove students from schools.[115] Given that teacher support for zero-tolerance policies remains widespread (for example, 74% teachers support zero tolerance in Virginia),[116] effective school leadership is paramount to getting staff buy-in to shift away from exclusionary discipline practices.[117] However, principal surveys have found that a third of principals did not have any training during their preparation programs on using discipline for restorative purposes.[118]

Educator working conditions

Staffing shortages exacerbate the already stressful working conditions that educators face, particularly those in under-resourced schools that disproportionately serve students of color. When educators are stretched thin and overwhelmed, they may have less bandwidth to respond to students' social and emotional needs and resort to removing students from classrooms. Studies also suggest that teachers in cognitively demanding and stressful environments are more likely to rely on gut reactions when making decisions, increasing the threat of implicit bias entering decisions.[119] Principals operating at the brink of their capacity with overwhelming work schedules also have little time to develop staff capacity and engage resources such as counselors, social workers, and parents.[120]

Resources

Funding and resource allocation play a major role in determining how schools operate, the quality of teachers, and the amount of student support services available.[121] Sufficient resources are required to prepare high-quality teachers, improve teacher working conditions, and provide professional development to equip educators with the skills to build a positive school climate and form close relationships with students. In addition, having sufficient support staff such as counselors and social workers can help ease the workload of teachers and administrators, increasing their bandwidth to respond to students' social and emotional needs. Research shows that access to high-quality and adequate support services is associated with fewer incidences of student misbehavior and lower rates of suspensions.[122]

Unfortunately, school funding is not equitable in the United States, as evidenced by data showing that school districts serving the largest concentrations of students of color receive about $1,800 less per student in state and local funding compared to districts serving the lowest concentrations of students of color.[123] Research has found that schools in lower-income neighborhoods tend to have less instructional resources and higher suspension rates, compared to schools serving the highest-income neighborhoods.[124]

Policy Implications

Efforts to improve approaches to school discipline must be part of a comprehensive approach to address inequities in educational opportunity. The federal government, states, districts, and schools can use these Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data to identify where to target their resources to ensure that all students have equal access to safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments.

Following are six key policy strategies for reducing suspension gaps and exclusionary discipline practices overall at the state and local levels:

1. **Eliminate zero-tolerance and other exclusionary policies, restrict the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for lower-level offenses, and reduce the length of suspensions for more serious offenses.** States and local education agencies can end zero-tolerance and other harsh policies to provide flexibility for educators to consider the severity and situational context when a student violates school rules. State and local policymakers can also require educators to manage disorderly conduct and nonviolent offenses rather than refer them to the police, so that such behavior is addressed in schools instead of in the criminal justice system. Through legislation or other policy reform, states and districts also can prohibit exclusionary disciplinary actions for students who commit nonviolent infractions such as truancy, tardiness, and willful defiance. For example, California prohibits suspensions for minor misbehaviors of students in grades k–5.[125] In addition, states and districts can protect students' learning opportunities by requiring schools to limit the length of suspensions and provide alternative education services to suspended students.
2. **Support evidence-based alternative strategies to exclusionary discipline, such as implementing schoolwide restorative practices and teaching social and emotional skills.** Restorative practices are a proactive, relationship-centered approach to building a positive school climate and addressing student behavior.[126] Such practices integrate with social and emotional learning, as students are encouraged to acknowledge and manage their emotions, develop empathy for others, and establish positive relationships.[127] Research has found that restorative practices are effective in reducing suspensions and improving school climate, especially programs that are implemented schoolwide.[128] States and districts can leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act Title IV, Part A—the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant Program—to fund restorative initiatives.
3. **Collect and report disaggregated data on exclusionary discipline in a timely manner and use the data to inform equity reviews of district and school discipline policies.** States and districts should support accurate reporting of the use of exclusionary discipline in schools, disaggregated by student characteristics such as race, ethnicity, disability status, gender, and income level, and include school discipline in their statewide accountability and continuous improvement systems. Currently, three states have included suspension rates in their accountability systems: California, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.[129] Data on the amount of lost instruction due to exclusionary discipline, as collected by the federal government, should also be collected, disaggregated, and reported to the public on an annual basis. These data can help identify districts and schools that need extra support to transition to more equitable and restorative discipline practices.

For example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education conducts investigations into schools with high suspension rates and large disparities in suspension and provides technical assistance to these schools to improve their school climate.[130] Legislation in Indiana requires the state education agency to survey school discipline policies and determine the extent to which positive discipline and restorative justice practices are used. The Indiana Department of Education works to ensure that educators have access to the support and training they need to implement restorative practices.[131]

4. **Develop educator preparation standards for supporting positive climates and using restorative practices to manage classrooms.** Many teachers and principals are unprepared to use positive discipline practices that can reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline. States can include competencies in building strong relationships, creating supportive climates, and using restorative practices in their standards for approving educator preparation programs and licenses. For example, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing passed new standards for teachers and administrators, requiring educators to know how to teach social and emotional skills and use restorative practices to manage classrooms.

5. **Provide professional learning to help educators create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments and foster trusting relationships with students.** Educators who empathize and form trusting relationships with their students are able to solicit students' cooperation and engagement more effectively, reducing the need for exclusionary discipline to maintain a constructive learning environment.[132] Educators are able to form closer relationships with students when they understand and value the cultures, identities, and experiences of students and their families.[133] States and districts can provide resources and training for educators. This can include professional development focused on mitigating implicit biases, developing empathy for students, creating multi-tiered systems of support, advancing restorative practices, providing support for students with disabilities, and transforming the school culture to one that values students from diverse backgrounds. In addition to state funds, states can use up to 5% of their state set-asides for statewide activities under ESSA Title II, Part A, for related teacher professional development.

6. **Invest in support services that meet the needs of students and educators.** Research shows that access to high-quality and adequate support services, including mental health and social services, is associated with fewer incidences of student misbehavior and lower rates of suspensions.[134] With the COVID-19 pandemic and struggles for racial justice taking an immense toll on children's mental health, additional resources will be required to meet students' needs.[135] A national survey of 3,300 youth found that about 30% of respondents felt unhappy or depressed, and nearly as many did not feel connected to their school community and had to worry about meeting their basic food and health care needs.[136] Research shows that pandemic-induced trauma is disproportionately borne by children of color.[137] States and districts can allocate resources to provide wraparound supports for high-need students and their families and hire more social workers, counselors, and school psychologists in schools serving these students. Hiring a sufficient number of support staff, such as counselors and restorative justice coaches, can also increase the school's

capacity to implement restorative practices. These supports also help ease the workload of teachers and administrators, increasing their bandwidth to respond to students' social and emotional needs without resorting to exclusionary discipline. In addition, educators can have more capacity to participate in professional development opportunities that would enable them to better engage students and implement restorative practices in schools.

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which created the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to support k–12 schools. Districts can use CRRSAA and ARPA funds for any activity authorized under ESSA, including the strategies outlined above.[138] Further, states may be able to use funds for similar strategies as long as they are used "for emergency needs as determined by the state educational agency to address issues responding to coronavirus."[139]

To support state and local efforts, policymakers at the federal level can:

1. **Update and reissue the 2014 "Non-Discriminatory Administration of School Discipline" guidance.** Many students of color, particularly Black and Native American students, continue to be disproportionately suspended. Although progress was made under the 2014 guidance in limiting exclusionary disciplinary practices and reducing racial disparities in discipline, implementing restorative practices, and protecting civil rights, the guidance was revoked in 2018. The guidance should be reissued and updated regularly to align with the research on effective and non-discriminatory practices. The updated guidance should include:

    - information on how states, districts, and schools can identify and target resources to increase access to mental health services and supports for students of color;
    - technical assistance to support stakeholders in understanding and implementing the guidance;
    - recommendations and resources for implementing non-discriminatory school discipline in virtual learning settings;
    - an updated compendium of current examples of state and district approaches to implementing best practices outlined in the guidance, searchable by topic area and updated regularly;
    - recommendations for professional learning opportunities for educators on implementing alternative strategies to exclusionary discipline; and
    - research and examples on how states, districts, and schools can build positive school climates through restorative practices and revise codes of conduct to reduce the use of suspensions and expulsions for ambiguous categorization of student behavior such as willful defiance.[140]

    Finally, to help the public better understand the Department of Education's role related to school discipline, the guidance should clarify the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights statutory oversight and enforcement role to investigate claims of discriminatory school discipline practices.

2. **Support the dissemination and use of newly released Department of Education resources aimed at reducing exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities.** Despite some progress over time, students with disabilities continue to be disproportionately suspended. In July 2022, the Department of Education released guidance on the legal requirements for disciplining students with disabilities under the Individuals With Disabilities Act and supportive materials to help educators meet the needs of students with disabilities. Federal policymakers can dedicate resources to promote this guidance and support states, districts, and schools in implementing changes to their current discipline practices.
3. **Offer technical assistance and increase oversight and accountability to ensure that states and districts accurately report data on their use of exclusionary discipline and referrals to law enforcement.** To better understand the use of suspension in schools, the OCR should also require schools to report the total number of suspensions a school issued, in addition to the number of students who were suspended and the total days students missed due to suspensions. This would enable government departments, researchers, and advocates to identify states, districts, and schools with high suspension rates, high magnitudes of lost instruction, and large disparities in suspension rates and to intervene as appropriate.
4. **Provide additional funding for professional learning that helps educators create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments and adopt restorative discipline practices.** The federal government can support professional learning opportunities that help educators create positive learning environments by increasing funding through ESSA Title II, Part A. Additional resources could be targeted toward professional development activities focused on areas that can reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, such as restorative practices, supporting students of color and students with disabilities, developing empathy for students, and employing asset-based approaches that help students build social and emotional skills.

Conclusion

Our analyses of the Civil Rights Data Collection data provide evidence that exclusionary discipline practices like out-of-school suspensions can be reduced and that suspension gaps can be narrowed. Indeed, from a high point in the early 2010s until the year of the most currently available data, out-of-school suspensions have declined across the nation and in most states. In addition, our analyses find that Black–white, Native American–white, and disabled–nondisabled suspension gaps have narrowed. These gaps narrowed nationally as well as in many states.

Despite this progress, millions of students continue to miss out on classroom instruction due to exclusionary discipline. Suspensions also continue to be meted out disproportionately to Black students, Native American students, and students with disabilities. The consequences can be devastating. Research shows that suspended students frequently struggle in school, drop out, and become involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.[141] Often this loss of instructional time could be avoided, especially for those students suspended for minor misbehaviors.

From the research literature, we learn that strategies aimed at decreasing exclusionary discipline can be effective. Promising practices include implementing restorative practices, increasing access to well-prepared educators who can engage diverse students, and investing in student support services to address the root causes of student behavior. Efforts to improve equity in school discipline must be part of a comprehensive approach to address inequities in educational opportunity and provide all students with equal access to safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments.

Appendix A: Methodology

The findings from this report are mainly based on analyses of the 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). In looking at trends in out-of-school suspension rates, we also included data points from 1973, 1982–83, 1988–89, 1996–97, 2000–01, 2002–03, 2004–05, 2006–07, and 2009–10, which we drew from other research and estimates published by the Office for Civil Rights.[142] In the CRDC survey, several race and ethnic groups were referred to differently than the labels used in this report. "Latino/a" was referred to as "Hispanic or Latino of any race" in the survey; "Native American" was referred to as "American Indian or Alaska Native"; "Pacific Islander" was referred to as "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander"; and "Black" was referred to as "Black or African American." We used the shorter names in this report for simplicity.

Data Cleaning

We first merged school characteristics data (which includes grades offered and school type), enrollment data, and suspension data from the 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18 CRDC data sets. We then removed juvenile justice facilities, virtual schools, and homeschools from the analytic sample by using the juvenile justice indicator variable in the CRDC data set and by filtering schools and districts that included "juvenile," "virtual," "online," or "homeschool" in their names. We also removed schools that had zero enrollment.

Next, we calculated the number of students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions in each school by adding the number of males and females who received one out-of-school suspension and the number of males and females who received two or more out-of-school suspensions. We then divided this by the total number of students in the school to produce the suspension rate. Some schools had suspension rates that were greater than 100%. This could be due to two reasons: (1) misreporting of data, and/or (2) schools with high suspension rates significantly expanding their enrollment during the school year (schools report enrollment data in October, whereas suspension data is reported based on the entire school year). Because the latter is possible in alternative schools but unlikely to happen in traditional schools,[143] we removed traditional schools that had suspension rates greater than 100% and alternative schools with suspension rates greater than 150%. Schools were only removed if they had enrollments of 10 or more students. Table A1 summarizes the number of schools removed by year, and Table A2 shows the final number of districts, schools, and students represented in our analyses.

Table A1
Number of Traditional and Alternative Schools Removed Due to Improbable Suspension Rates, by Year

Year	Traditional Schools Removed	Alternative Schools Removed
2011–12	1,386	401
2013–14	783	167
2015–16	685	192
2017–18	418	115
Total	3,272	875

Table A2
Number of Districts, Schools, and Students Represented in the CRDC Data Set, by Year

Year	Districts	Schools	Students
2011–12	16,308	91,497	48,520,680
2013–14	16,571	92,038	49,194,108
2015–16	17,178	94,469	50,081,668
2017–18	17,458	94,237	50,284,952

Next, we sorted schools into elementary, secondary, and k–12 schools based on the grades each school offered. Table A3 summarizes how we categorized schools by level, and Table A4 shows the number of schools that were sorted into each category by year.

Table A3
Grade-Span Configurations of Elementary, Secondary, and Combined Schools

Category	Grade-Span Configurations
Elementary	Schools with any combination of grades k–5 and without any grades above 7th grade
Secondary	Schools with any combination of grades 6–12 and without any lower grades
K–12	All elementary and secondary schools, and k–8 and k–12 schools

Table A4
Number of Elementary, Secondary, and K–12 Schools in the CRDC Data Set, by Year

Year	Elementary Schools	Secondary Schools	K–12 Schools
2011–12	46,242	33,582	11,673
2013–14	46,241	34,123	11,674
2015–16	46,470	34,330	13,669
2017–18	46,733	34,951	12,553

Data Analysis

To calculate the suspension rates of students by race and ethnicity, school level, and disability status, we first added the number of students from each subgroup who received one suspension and the number of students who received two or more suspensions. This produced the total number of students from each subgroup who were suspended that school year in the school. We then added the

totals from each school to produce a national or state total, which we divided by the total number of students enrolled in that subgroup in the country to produce the national or state suspension rate. Enrollment numbers for each student subgroup except for students without disabilities were directly provided in the data set. To calculate the number of students without disabilities, we subtracted the number of students with disabilities from the total number of students enrolled.

Using the same method, we calculated overall in-school suspension rates at both the national and state level and analyzed their changes from 2011–12 to 2017–18. We reported whether these trends mirrored trends in out-of-school suspension at the national and state levels, as this could help readers determine whether any decreases in out-of-school suspensions were genuine or whether schools had just switched to in-school suspensions instead.

Finally, to compare out-of-school suspension gaps between subgroups of students and across years, we simply subtracted the suspension rate of one group from another and reported the percentage-point differences.

We describe suspension gaps between student groups in two ways: (1) in absolute percentage differences between the two groups (e.g., 5 percentage point gap), and (2) the relative magnitude of one group's rate versus another (e.g., four times as likely to be suspended). Relative measures can be misleading, especially at extreme values. For example, if the suspension rates for group A and group B were 5% and 10%, respectively, the absolute difference is 5 percentage points, and in relative terms group B is suspended at twice the rate of group A. However, if the suspension rates were 0.1% for group A and 0.5% for group B, the absolute difference would be just 0.4 percentage points—much lower than in the first case, but the relative difference would be much larger, with group B suspended at five times the rate of group A. Therefore, we always present absolute percentage differences in this report, but at times we also provide the relative difference for illustrative purposes.

Appendix B: State-by-State Analysis

Table B1
Change in Out-of-School Suspension Rates in Secondary Schools by State, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Average Annual Enrollment, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Out-of-School Suspension Rate, 2011–12 (%)	Out-of-School Suspension Rate, 2017–18 (%)	Change in Suspension Rates, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (Percentage Points)
Alabama	308,272	15.4	10.8	-4.6
Alaska	48,513	8.0	7.4	-0.6
Arizona	436,859	9.6	7.7	-1.9
Arkansas	211,995	12.2	10.4	-1.9
California	2,852,723	8.9	4.9	-4.0
Colorado	388,469	8.6	7.2	-1.4
Connecticut	249,403	6.6	5.3	-1.3
Delaware	62,616	15.8	11.9	-3.9
Florida	1,283,491	16.3	7.0	-9.3
Georgia	855,305	12.7	9.3	-3.5
Hawaii	79,506	2.8	6.9	4.1
Idaho	133,100	5.8	3.7	-2.2
Illinois	883,312	9.8	5.4	-4.4
Indiana	476,983	10.9	7.9	-2.9
Iowa	226,938	6.7	5.5	-1.3
Kansas	222,173	6.5	6.6	0.1
Kentucky	321,274	9.6	8.5	-1.1
Louisiana	276,073	14.0	11.9	-2.0
Maine	76,883	7.3	6.0	-1.3
Maryland	417,187	9.7	6.8	-3.0
Massachusetts	422,665	8.3	4.8	-3.5
Michigan	701,841	11.7	8.9	-2.8
Minnesota	399,660	6.0	5.2	-0.8
Mississippi	210,226	16.1	14.7	-1.4
Missouri	423,704	10.7	7.5	-3.2
Montana	66,157	7.2	5.4	-1.8
Nebraska	142,743	8.4	7.1	-1.3

State	Average Annual Enrollment, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Out-of-School Suspension Rate, 2011–12 (%)	Out-of-School Suspension Rate, 2017–18 (%)	Change in Suspension Rates, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (Percentage Points)
Nevada	223,418	9.7	8.8	-0.9
New Hampshire	83,981	9.3	8.0	-1.3
New Jersey	601,058	8.0	6.0	-1.9
New Mexico	158,517	13.1	9.0	-4.1
New York	1,257,947	5.2	4.2	-1.0
North Carolina	736,008	13.6	9.9	-3.7
North Dakota	49,242	3.8	3.6	-0.2
Ohio	776,411	10.0	8.2	-1.8
Oklahoma	282,880	9.2	7.3	-1.9
Oregon	268,953	8.9	5.7	-3.2
Pennsylvania	778,120	8.6	7.2	-1.4
Rhode Island	64,310	14.9	7.1	-7.9
South Carolina	356,116	16.4	14.8	-1.6
South Dakota	62,816	6.3	4.7	-1.5
Tennessee	419,716	12.6	8.8	-3.8
Texas	2,412,610	8.9	6.4	-2.5
Utah	268,227	4.5	2.7	-1.8
Vermont	31,205	8.5	5.2	-3.3
Virginia	634,846	10.8	7.9	-2.8
Washington	523,610	8.7	5.7	-3.0
Washington, DC	24,323	23.5	14.9	-8.6
West Virginia	120,329	13.6	10.3	-3.3
Wisconsin	385,063	8.2	6.2	-2.0
Wyoming	43,268	6.6	5.8	-0.8

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

Table B2
Changes in Black–White Out-of-School Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools by State, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Black Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Black Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Black Students (%)		Black–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
Alabama	109,748	35.6	27.6	20.6	19.0	14.7
Alaska	1,973	4.1	16.4	15.4	9.7	9.7
Arizona	23,064	5.3	17.3	14.7	10.3	8.7
Arkansas	43,056	20.3	27.3	20.9	19.7	14.6
California	178,188	6.2	20.5	12.7	13.3	8.7
Colorado	19,064	4.9	17.6	14.1	11.8	8.6
Connecticut	28,853	11.6	16.6	13.3	13.1	10.7
Delaware	19,653	31.4	26.7	21.2	17.3	14.4
Florida	286,647	22.3	26.4	12.8	14.6	7.1
Georgia	316,083	37.0	21.2	16.2	14.4	11.3
Hawaii	1,669	2.1	4.6	6.9	1.8	1.4
Idaho	1,631	1.2	13.4	6.6	8.4	3.3
Illinois	135,707	15.4	24.3	15.7	18.5	12.6
Indiana	50,662	10.6	27.8	21.1	19.8	15.3
Iowa	13,066	5.8	26.0	20.0	21.1	15.9
Kansas	16,295	7.3	17.3	19.0	12.6	14.2
Kentucky	36,107	11.2	23.1	21.7	15.4	14.9
Louisiana	121,201	43.9	19.9	17.5	11.1	10.1
Maine	2,650	3.4	14.6	9.4	7.6	3.5
Maryland	141,550	33.9	15.3	11.9	9.0	7.8
Massachusetts	36,496	8.6	16.8	10.2	10.9	7.0
Michigan	107,568	15.3	27.6	20.5	19.5	14.0
Minnesota	38,487	9.6	20.3	16.4	16.6	13.2
Mississippi	109,147	51.9	22.9	22.0	14.2	14.9
Missouri	63,875	15.1	27.6	19.5	20.7	14.3
Montana	745	1.1	11.2	6.4	5.6	2.2
Nebraska	9,233	6.5	32.5	25.3	26.8	20.6
Nevada	23,486	10.5	20.5	22.5	13.6	16.5
New Hampshire	1,888	2.2	24.6	18.3	15.8	11.0

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Black Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Black Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Black Students (%)		Black–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
New Jersey	88,330	14.7	18.1	15.7	13.1	12.3
New Mexico	3,356	2.1	21.8	14.2	13.1	7.4
New York	219,805	17.5	8.8	7.6	4.0	3.6
North Carolina	192,679	26.2	24.3	19.2	16.0	13.3
North Dakota	2,132	4.3	6.6	6.9	4.0	4.3
Ohio	110,100	14.2	25.7	20.7	18.9	15.0
Oklahoma	26,761	9.5	20.0	17.8	12.4	11.6
Oregon	6,335	2.4	21.7	11.9	14.3	6.6
Pennsylvania	95,164	12.2	23.3	19.5	17.8	14.9
Rhode Island	5,510	8.6	26.1	11.7	15.1	6.4
South Carolina	123,201	34.6	26.0	26.2	15.6	17.3
South Dakota	1,846	2.9	15.0	11.6	11.2	8.6
Tennessee	94,772	22.6	29.1	23.4	21.8	18.5
Texas	304,616	12.6	19.9	15.0	15.4	11.6
Utah	3,758	1.4	14.6	7.1	11.1	5.0
Vermont	878	2.8	13.8	8.5	5.4	3.2
Virginia	147,054	23.2	21.2	17.5	13.9	12.4
Washington	24,426	4.7	18.5	12.8	11.3	8.1
Washington, DC	18,629	76.6	26.4	19.2	22.0	17.7
West Virginia	6,283	5.2	27.5	20.8	14.7	11.1
Wisconsin	31,234	8.1	34.8	25.0	30.3	21.2
Wyoming	551	1.3	16.5	11.3	10.8	6.2

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

Table B3
Changes in Native American–White Out-of-School Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools by State, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Native American Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Native American Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Native American Students (%)		Native American–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
Alabama	2,526	0.8	12.9	8.5	4.3	2.5
Alaska	7,855	16.2	10.1	10.1	3.4	4.4
Arizona	23,338	5.3	19.0	14.5	12.0	8.5
Arkansas	1,626	0.8	8.9	11.4	1.3	5.1
California	19,231	0.7	17.2	9.2	10.1	5.2
Colorado	3,443	0.9	17.7	10.6	11.9	5.0
Connecticut	883	0.4	11.6	6.9	8.1	4.3
Delaware	292	0.5	18.5	10.1	9.1	3.3
Florida	5,141	0.4	16.2	7.3	4.4	1.6
Georgia	2,115	0.2	13.6	7.8	6.8	2.8
Hawaii	369	0.5	6.9	7.1	4.0	1.7
Idaho	1,897	1.4	10.5	7.8	5.4	4.6
Illinois	2,815	0.3	14.3	4.8	8.5	1.7
Indiana	1,455	0.3	13.8	6.2	5.8	0.4
Iowa	1,119	0.5	11.6	7.9	6.7	3.8
Kansas	2,783	1.3	9.8	8.5	5.0	3.7
Kentucky	582	0.2	9.5	6.7	1.8	0.0
Louisiana	1,928	0.7	16.8	11.3	7.9	3.9
Maine	617	0.8	12.8	6.2	5.8	0.3
Maryland	1,312	0.3	15.6	7.3	9.3	3.2
Massachusetts	1,207	0.3	16.8	6.5	11.0	3.3
Michigan	5,493	0.8	15.1	12.3	7.0	5.8
Minnesota	6,703	1.7	18.9	13.6	15.2	10.4
Mississippi	578	0.3	7.8	11.0	-0.9	3.9
Missouri	2,089	0.5	14.1	7.2	7.2	2.0
Montana	7,146	10.8	19.1	14.6	13.6	10.5
Nebraska	2,049	1.4	18.0	15.9	12.3	11.2
Nevada	2,218	1.0	17.1	14.6	10.2	8.6

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Native American Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Native American Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Native American Students (%)		Native American–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
New Hampshire	321	0.4	9.2	7.7	0.4	0.5
New Jersey	907	0.2	11.1	5.5	6.1	2.1
New Mexico	16,885	10.7	15.4	9.2	6.7	2.5
New York	7,910	0.6	9.4	4.7	4.5	0.7
North Carolina	8,892	1.2	20.9	15.3	12.5	9.4
North Dakota	4,340	8.8	12.6	10.8	9.9	8.2
Ohio	1,441	0.2	10.9	8.2	4.1	2.5
Oklahoma	42,462	15.0	9.0	7.3	1.5	1.2
Oregon	4,422	1.6	17.8	11.4	10.3	6.0
Pennsylvania	1,484	0.2	10.4	8.7	4.8	4.1
Rhode Island	468	0.7	35.7	18.4	24.7	13.1
South Carolina	1,278	0.4	19.4	13.8	9.0	4.9
South Dakota	5,901	9.4	22.9	13.2	19.1	10.2
Tennessee	1,020	0.2	11.4	6.5	4.2	1.6
Texas	10,518	0.4	8.7	5.5	4.2	2.1
Utah	3,293	1.2	11.2	6.3	7.8	4.1
Vermont	296	0.9	17.0	4.8	8.6	-0.5
Virginia	2,176	0.3	15.1	6.7	7.8	1.5
Washington	7,604	1.5	19.5	11.1	12.3	6.4
West Virginia	182	0.2	7.5	9.4	-5.3	-0.2
Wisconsin	5,132	1.3	18.0	11.3	13.5	7.5
Wyoming	1,425	3.3	13.6	12.1	8.0	7.0

Note: We excluded Washington, DC, from this analysis because of its low Native American middle and high school student population (only about 66 students on average per year from 2011–12 to 2017–18).

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

Table B4
Changes in Latino/a–White Out-of-School Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools by State, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Latino/a Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Latino/a Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Latino/a Students (%)		Latino/a–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
Alabama	15,777	5.1	8.8	4.6	0.2	-1.3
Alaska	3,612	7.4	9.6	7.1	2.9	1.4
Arizona	185,889	42.6	10.4	8.0	3.4	2.0
Arkansas	23,600	11.1	10.5	12.1	2.9	5.8
California	1,494,645	52.4	9.3	5.1	2.2	1.2
Colorado	123,876	31.9	12.2	8.9	6.4	3.4
Connecticut	48,020	19.3	12.4	9.3	8.9	6.8
Delaware	8,653	13.8	16.7	10.0	7.3	3.2
Florida	388,050	30.2	16.7	5.1	4.9	-0.6
Georgia	109,917	12.9	11.0	6.4	4.2	1.5
Hawaii	5,688	7.2	4.9	8.3	2.0	2.8
Idaho	22,011	16.5	8.7	5.1	3.7	1.9
Illinois	200,342	22.7	10.6	4.7	4.9	1.6
Indiana	44,194	9.3	13.7	7.9	5.7	2.0
Iowa	20,915	9.2	11.5	5.9	6.7	1.8
Kansas	38,386	17.3	8.8	7.9	4.1	3.1
Kentucky	15,166	4.7	10.8	7.9	3.1	1.2
Louisiana	13,734	5.0	12.7	9.0	3.9	1.6
Maine	1,401	1.8	14.3	7.1	7.3	1.2
Maryland	56,198	13.5	7.8	5.2	1.5	1.1
Massachusetts	63,805	15.1	15.3	8.9	9.5	5.7
Michigan	42,869	6.1	15.3	9.4	7.2	2.9
Minnesota	30,179	7.6	10.2	6.9	6.5	3.7
Mississippi	6,098	2.9	9.6	7.4	0.9	0.3
Missouri	21,010	5.0	12.5	6.1	5.6	0.9
Montana	2,520	3.8	10.7	6.6	5.2	2.4
Nebraska	23,960	16.8	10.2	8.1	4.5	3.4
Nevada	91,716	41.1	10.2	8.0	3.3	2.0

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Latino/a Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Latino/a Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Latino/a Students (%)		Latino/a–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
New Hampshire	4,103	4.9	13.9	16.1	5.1	8.9
New Jersey	125,418	20.9	11.3	7.7	6.3	4.3
New Mexico	94,657	59.7	14.4	9.8	5.7	3.0
New York	301,598	24.0	4.3	3.6	-0.5	-0.4
North Carolina	102,433	13.9	13.4	8.3	5.0	2.4
North Dakota	1,802	3.7	6.8	4.3	4.2	1.7
Ohio	30,956	4.0	14.7	9.9	8.0	4.2
Oklahoma	38,204	13.5	9.5	6.5	1.9	0.4
Oregon	58,173	21.6	11.4	6.2	3.9	0.8
Pennsylvania	68,005	8.7	16.3	11.7	10.8	7.1
Rhode Island	14,608	22.7	21.9	9.2	11.0	3.9
South Carolina	24,317	6.8	14.7	9.3	4.3	0.4
South Dakota	2,812	4.5	11.3	7.4	7.5	4.4
Tennessee	28,558	6.8	12.5	7.5	5.3	2.6
Texas	1,219,465	50.5	9.4	6.5	4.9	3.1
Utah	42,291	15.8	7.9	4.5	4.4	2.4
Vermont	510	1.6	11.9	2.8	3.5	-2.5
Virginia	79,917	12.6	8.8	6.4	1.5	1.3
Washington	106,306	20.3	11.3	7.5	4.1	2.9
Washington, DC	3,281	13.5	12.8	6.1	8.3	4.6
West Virginia	1,806	1.5	14.9	8.5	2.1	-1.2
Wisconsin	36,940	9.6	12.5	7.9	8.0	4.1
Wyoming	5,483	12.7	10.1	8.0	4.5	2.9

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

Table B5
Changes in Pacific Islander–White Out-of-School Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools by State, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Pacific Islander Students, 2011–12	Avg. Percentage of Pacific Islander Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Pacific Islander Students (%)		Pacific Islander–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
Alabama	350	0.1	6.8	8.0	-1.9	2.1
Alaska	1,514	3.1	14.4	15.9	7.7	10.3
Arizona	1,617	0.4	12.9	6.3	5.9	0.3
Arkansas	1,347	0.6	17.2	16.0	9.6	9.6
California	22,233	0.8	10.7	6.1	3.5	2.1
Colorado	1,113	0.3	9.5	7.6	3.7	2.0
Connecticut	284	0.1	9.7	3.8	6.2	1.2
Delaware	151	0.2	19.6	6.0	10.2	-0.8
Florida	1,902	0.1	9.7	5.6	-2.1	-0.1
Georgia	1,146	0.1	11.8	5.2	5.0	0.3
Hawaii	25,618	32.2	4.3	11.3	1.4	5.9
Idaho	587	0.4	8.2	3.5	3.1	0.2
Illinois	1,160	0.1	9.3	3.4	3.5	0.3
Indiana	433	0.1	7.6	4.6	-0.4	-1.3
Iowa	538	0.2	10.1	8.7	5.3	4.6
Kansas	503	0.2	5.5	5.3	0.8	0.5
Kentucky	393	0.1	3.9	7.3	-3.7	0.6
Louisiana	234	0.1	2.0	5.7	-6.9	-1.7
Maine	119	0.2	4.1	2.4	-2.9	-3.5
Maryland	1,530	0.4	4.8	4.9	-1.6	0.8
Massachusetts	604	0.1	7.6	4.2	1.8	0.9
Michigan	900	0.1	4.9	5.8	-3.2	-0.7
Minnesota	414	0.1	5.6	5.6	1.9	2.4
Mississippi	125	0.1	104.2	4.7	95.4	-2.4
Missouri	990	0.2	8.7	8.2	1.8	3.0
Montana	208	0.3	7.8	3.9	2.2	-0.2
Nebraska	246	0.2	8.2	6.3	2.5	1.6
Nevada	3,090	1.4	10.6	8.7	3.8	2.7

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Pacific Islander Students, 2011–12	Avg. Percentage of Pacific Islander Students, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Pacific Islander Students (%)		Pacific Islander–White Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
New Hampshire	104	0.1	3.5	7.8	-5.3	0.5
New Jersey	1,424	0.2	6.7	3.4	1.7	-0.1
New Mexico	222	0.1	6.1	5.6	-2.7	-1.1
New York	2,971	0.2	2.4	1.8	-2.4	-2.2
North Carolina	1,080	0.1	8.5	8.6	0.2	2.7
North Dakota	176	0.4	9.7	0.6	7.0	-2.0
Ohio	665	0.1	11.0	5.6	4.2	0.0
Oklahoma	996	0.4	12.2	8.8	4.6	2.6
Oregon	2,023	0.8	11.7	6.1	4.2	0.7
Pennsylvania	784	0.1	8.2	4.4	2.6	-0.2
Rhode Island	118	0.2	14.4	7.6	3.4	2.3
South Carolina	587	0.2	14.4	10.8	4.0	1.8
Tennessee	594	0.1	8.5	5.6	1.2	0.8
Texas	3,893	0.2	9.2	4.2	4.6	0.7
Utah	4,156	1.5	9.6	4.6	6.1	2.5
Virginia	1,087	0.2	8.3	4.7	1.0	-0.4
Washington	5,345	1.0	16.2	9.3	9.0	4.6
Wisconsin	435	0.1	5.4	5.6	0.9	1.8
Wyoming	111	0.3	1.2	3.6	-4.5	-1.5

Note: We excluded three states and Washington, DC, from this analysis because of their low Pacific Islander secondary school student population. These states are South Dakota (86 students per year on average from 2011–12 to 2017–18), Vermont (65 students), and West Virginia (62 students). Washington, DC, had 39 students per year on average.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

Table B6
Changes in Out-of-School Suspension Gaps in Secondary Schools Between Students With and Without Disabilities by State, 2011–12 to 2017–18

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Students With Disabilities, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Students With Disabilities, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Students With Disabilities (%)		Disabled–Nondisabled Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
Alabama	36,089	12.0	21.7	15.7	6.9	5.6
Alaska	5,846	12.3	16.9	15.4	9.9	9.1
Arizona	45,687	10.8	19.4	12.0	10.8	4.7
Arkansas	21,672	10.6	19.3	19.5	8.0	10.4
California	294,019	10.5	18.9	10.0	11.0	5.8
Colorado	37,326	9.8	18.9	14.6	11.2	8.3
Connecticut	31,093	12.6	16.6	12.1	11.1	7.9
Delaware	8,532	13.8	29.6	25.2	15.5	15.6
Florida	152,892	12.0	34.8	13.7	20.7	7.6
Georgia	95,338	11.2	21.1	15.7	9.3	7.4
Hawaii	9,270	11.7	20.9	13.7	20.9	7.6
Idaho	10,396	8.2	12.8	8.6	7.7	5.4
Illinois	107,756	12.4	18.5	11.4	9.9	6.8
Indiana	63,687	13.6	20.3	14.6	10.8	7.7
Iowa	27,338	12.4	15.3	12.6	9.9	8.1
Kansas	26,144	12.0	13.5	11.8	7.9	6.0
Kentucky	33,634	10.6	19.6	16.1	11.0	8.5
Louisiana	26,443	9.8	28.3	24.6	15.5	14.2
Maine	12,635	16.7	14.8	12.1	8.9	7.4
Maryland	44,490	10.7	21.8	14.3	13.5	8.5
Massachusetts	68,294	16.3	16.5	9.9	9.7	6.1
Michigan	77,164	11.4	22.8	17.2	12.6	9.4
Minnesota	53,383	13.5	16.2	11.4	11.8	7.3
Mississippi	19,797	9.9	25.5	22.1	9.7	8.2
Missouri	48,904	11.8	19.7	14.9	10.1	8.4
Montana	7,035	11.4	17.6	9.1	11.1	4.2
Nebraska	18,567	13.4	18.6	15.7	11.6	10.0
Nevada	22,837	10.3	31.5	15.7	24.1	7.7

State	Avg. Annual Enrollment of Students With Disabilities, 2011–12 to 2017–18	Avg. Percentage of Students With Disabilities, 2011–12 to 2017–18 (%)	Suspension Rate of Students With Disabilities (%)		Disabled–Nondisabled Suspension Gap (Percentage Points)	
			2011–12	2017–18	2011–12	2017–18
New Hampshire	12,261	15.0	19.7	16.1	12.0	9.5
New Jersey	91,720	15.6	15.5	10.9	8.8	5.8
New Mexico	20,813	13.5	21.3	14.9	9.0	6.9
New York	190,354	15.4	10.7	7.9	6.4	4.4
North Carolina	85,745	11.9	25.2	20.2	12.9	11.7
North Dakota	5,712	12.1	6.8	7.3	3.3	4.2
Ohio	111,060	14.4	18.8	16.7	10.3	9.9
Oklahoma	41,756	15.3	17.4	12.4	8.7	6.1
Oregon	33,540	12.6	18.3	11.6	10.7	6.8
Pennsylvania	125,193	16.2	15.2	13.6	7.7	7.6
Rhode Island	8,793	13.8	26.8	14.2	13.8	8.2
South Carolina	42,559	12.1	28.1	25.6	13.1	12.3
South Dakota	6,371	10.9	16.4	10.3	10.5	6.3
Tennessee	51,008	12.3	19.6	11.5	7.9	3.0
Texas	214,554	9.0	18.5	13.8	10.3	8.1
Utah	28,401	10.7	9.4	6.0	5.4	3.8
Vermont	4,413	14.5	18.4	12.9	12.3	9.1
Virginia	79,363	12.6	20.4	15.5	10.9	8.7
Washington	58,634	11.4	21.6	13.8	14.2	9.1
Washington, DC	4,039	17.1	37.6	24.2	15.9	11.2
West Virginia	16,677	14.0	19.2	19.2	6.5	10.5
Wisconsin	49,373	12.9	21.4	15.7	15.1	11.0
Wyoming	5,220	12.3	12.4	10.6	6.6	5.5

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12, 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2017–18.

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