

Sent to the Office

Is Oregon’s K–5 policy reform associated with equitable changes in school discipline actions for *all* racial groups?

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature limited the use of exclusionary discipline for students in grades K–5 to situations that pose a direct threat to the safety of other students and adults. The policy reform (which built on state legislation passed in 2013) had three goals:



Decrease overall rates of, as well as racial disparities in, exclusionary discipline

Increase the likelihood of nonexclusionary discipline—and reduce the likelihood of exclusionary discipline—when students are referred for office discipline

Reduce the use of exclusionary discipline for minor, disruptive, and aggression behavioral infractions¹ that are not a direct threat to others’ safety

In a recent study, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest examined whether K–5 Oregon students who were sent to the school office were more likely to receive exclusionary discipline—and were therefore less likely to receive nonexclusionary discipline—after the 2015 policy reform. The study analyzed office referral data from a voluntary sample of 401 schools that used the Schoolwide Information System (SWIS) for one or more years from 2011/12 to 2017/18.² This infographic highlights study findings related to whether Oregon’s 2015 policy reform met its goals.

What is exclusionary discipline?

Discipline actions that remove students from classroom instruction (such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, removal to an alternative setting, and expulsion)



What is nonexclusionary discipline?

Discipline actions that address the infraction but keep students in class (such as teacher conferences with the student, individualized instruction, detention, loss of privileges, conferences with parents/caregivers, and repayment of damaged or stolen property)



Why is equity in school discipline important?

Elementary students who are suspended are more likely to feel disconnected from school, be chronically absent, repeat grades, and fail academically.^{3,4} Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic students are more likely to be excluded than other students, after controlling for teacher-rated behavior.^{5,6} In fact, studies show students’ race is a stronger predictor that they will be suspended than their behavioral history, poverty level, gender, or disability status.^{7,8}

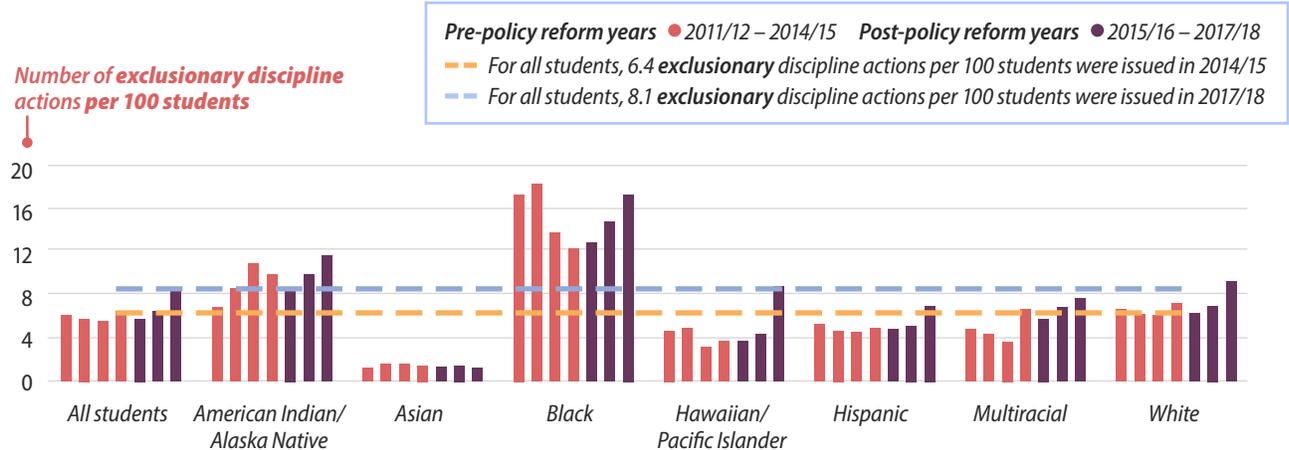
What did the study examine?

- 1 How did the number of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline actions differ before and after the 2015 policy reform?
- 2 Were office discipline referrals less likely to result in exclusionary discipline—and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline—after the 2015 policy reform, after controlling for other factors?
- 3 Were office discipline referrals for minor, disruptive, and aggression behavioral infractions less likely to result in exclusionary discipline—and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline—after the 2015 policy reform, after controlling for other factors?

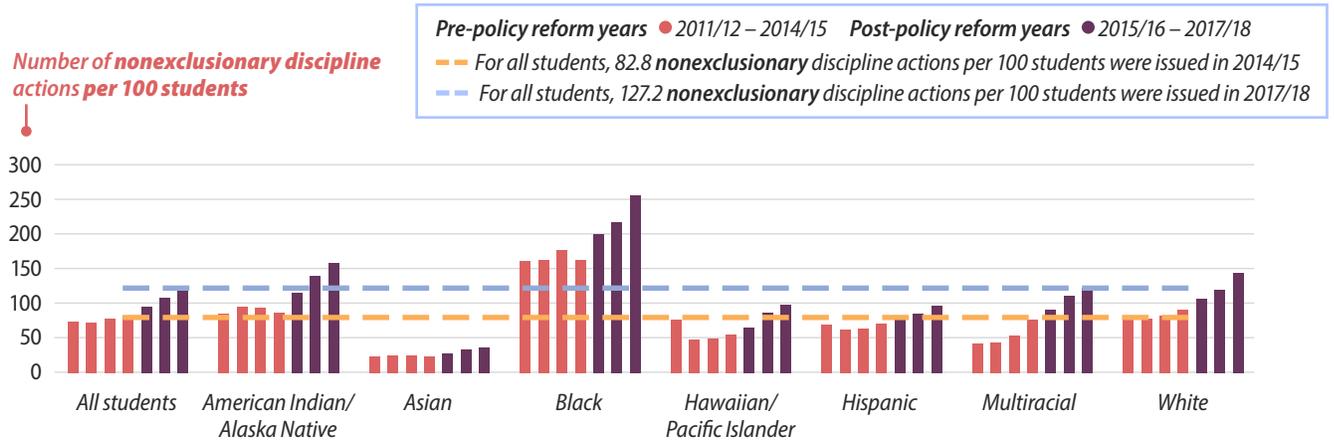
What did we find out?

1 For all students and each racial/ethnic student group in grades K–5, the numbers of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline actions were higher after the 2015 policy reform—and disproportionately high numbers of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students were disciplined across all study years.

Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students in grades K–5 received more exclusionary discipline actions than students overall both before and after the 2015 policy reform—and the numbers trended upward after the reform, 2011/12–2017/18



The numbers of nonexclusionary discipline actions were highest for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students in grades K–5 across all study years, 2011/12–2017/18



For the following findings, the study team **examined the association between the 2015 policy reform and changes in the likelihood** that office discipline referrals would result in exclusionary versus nonexclusionary discipline. To that end, the study team **conducted regression analyses**, which adjusted for other factors that could affect outcomes, including pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics. **See the full report for more information.**

2 For most racial/ethnic student groups in grades K–5, office discipline referrals became less likely to result in exclusionary discipline—and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline—after the 2015 policy reform. For Black students, the opposite was true.

↓ **For most racial/ethnic student groups**
Exclusionary discipline became less likely

↑ **For Black students**
Exclusionary discipline became more likely

3 With the exception of Black and Hispanic students, office discipline referrals issued for minor, disruptive, and aggression behavioral infractions⁹ became less likely—and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline—after the 2015 policy reform for most racial/ethnic student groups in grades K–5.

↓ **For most racial/ethnic student groups**
Exclusionary discipline became less likely for minor, disruptive, and aggression behavioral infractions

↑ **For Black students**
Exclusionary discipline became more likely for disruptive behavioral infractions only

↑ **For Hispanic students**
Exclusionary discipline became more likely for aggression behavioral infractions only

What are the implications for practice?

Based on the study findings, potential next steps for district and school teams include:



Conduct additional research to gain more in-depth understanding of root causes, barriers, and possible remedies for racial disparities in school discipline practices.



Provide professional development and coaching support to help educators identify and implement effective nonexclusionary discipline practices for disruptive behavioral infractions.



Monitor progress toward state policy goals using office discipline referral data for exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline disaggregated by student race/ethnicity.



Endnotes

¹ Minor infractions include brief or low-intensity behaviors the school identifies as “less serious” than other categories of behavior (for example, tardiness, talking back, and engaging in nonserious but inappropriate physical contact). Disruptive infractions include defiance, disrespect, insubordination, lying, cheating, attendance violations, and breaking school rules. Aggression infractions include verbal aggression, abusive language or profanity, fighting, physical aggression, harassment, and bullying.

² The study examined 784,512 office discipline referrals from 401 public schools serving grades K–5 that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and that used SWIS to manage their school discipline data for at least one year from 2011/12 to 2017/18.

³ Mitchell, M. M., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2013). Examining classroom influences on student perceptions of school climate: The role of classroom management and exclusionary discipline strategies. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*(5), 599–610.

⁴ Noltemeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & Mcloughlin, C. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review, 44*(2), 224–240. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1141532>

⁵ Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., O’Brennan, L. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Multilevel exploration of factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Black students in office disciplinary referrals. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*(2), 508–520. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ884851>

⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018). *K–12 education: Discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities* (GAO-18-258). Retrieved January 29, 2021, from <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-258>

⁷ Anyon, Y., Jenson, J. M., Altschul, I., Farrar, J., McQueen, J., Greer, E., et al. (2014). The persistent effect of race and the promise of alternatives to suspension in school discipline outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 44*, 379–386.

⁸ Rocque, M. (2010). Office discipline and student behavior: Does race matter? *American Journal of Education, 116*(4), 557–581. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ890463>

⁹ See endnote 1.

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