Training Guide for Using Data to Promote Equity in School Discipline

Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline

REL NORTHWEST

NOTE: These materials are part of a series, **"Using Data to Promote Equity in School Discipline,"** which comprises an introduction and four work sessions. To access the introduction/planning document, the other work session training guides, and the accompanying PowerPoint presentations, visit https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/ regions/northwest/news/equity-school-discipline.asp

The materials available in this series include:

- *Introduction: Planning and Facilitating Work Sessions to Improve School Discipline*
- *Work Session: Revising School Discipline Policies and Procedures to Promote Equity*
- *Work Session: Using School Discipline Data to Pinpoint Concerns and Track Progress*
- *Work Session: Using Reflection Groups to Learn How Families and Educators View Their School or District*
- *Work Session: Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline*

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Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline

In this work session, teams will have the opportunity to discuss school and classroom strategies associated with lower rates of exclusionary discipline. They will also use their data to plan interventions using the Plan-Do-Study-Act continuous improvement process.

Objectives

1. **Learn what the research says about school or classroom discipline practices that are associated with lower rates of school discipline.**

2. **Identify potential root causes that contribute to the school discipline concern.**

3. **Choose a school or district discipline practice that will be the focus of your intervention and identify strategies that your school or district could implement to improve school discipline practices.**

KEY TERMS

DATA INDICATORS: Data that provide information about progress toward a desired goal or outcome, such as reducing suspensions or racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline.

EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE: Discipline actions that remove students from classroom instruction, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or removal to an interim alternative education setting.

NONEXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE: Discipline actions that assign additional support or punitive consequences to students without removing them from classroom instruction.

PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT: A continuous improvement process that uses data to pinpoint concerns, identify interventions, develop an action plan, monitor progress, and adjust interventions as needed.

REFLECTION GROUPS: Focus groups that are designed to help school teams gather information from families and educators about how they view the school's learning environment and discipline practices.

Who should participate?

This work session is intended for school and/or district teams comprising members who oversee school climate and discipline policies and practices. The materials may also be useful to education service districts or other providers of coaching, technical assistance, and facilitation services to schools or districts

on improving school climate and discipline. For the remainder of this work session, the terms "team" or "team members" mean the information is applicable to either district- or school-level teams. The term "district team" will refer to information that is relevant for district-level teams only.

District team refers to a district-level team that is planning and/or implementing districtwide changes in school discipline policies and practices. Members of the district team should represent the various stakeholder groups that are involved in school discipline, including district administrators, school administrators, teachers, data analysts, and other education specialists.

School team refers to a school-level team that is planning and/or implementing school-level changes in school discipline policies and practices. Members of the school team should represent the various stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, specialists, data analysts, other education specialists and, if appropriate, a district representative. Both school and district teams should provide opportunities for students and parents to share their viewpoints and recommendations. For example, the team could include them as members of the team or actively collecting information about their perspectives as described in Using reflection groups to learn how families and educators view their school or district.

Organizing the work session

Careful preparation of the workspace and materials can increase the efficiency of the work team. The team needs a workspace that allows it to review, discuss, and complete its work with minimal interruptions or distractions. Each member should have a copy of the work session materials. A list of the data and discipline materials you will need to facilitate this work session is provided below (table 1).

TABLE 1.
Choosing school and classroom practices materials

Materials you will find in the work session materials

Facilitator's annotated agenda
Suggest reviewing and, if needed, adjusting the schedule to meet audience needs.

Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline presentation slide deck. See talking points by clicking orange icon in upper left corner of page.

Handout 1: *What the research says about school and classroom practices (information brief)*

Teamwork activity
- Handout 2: *School and classroom strategies*
- Handout 3: *Resources for creating an action plan*

Suggest making electronic AND paper copies for all team members.

Work session evaluation

Online REL Northwest report: *School discipline data indicators: A guide for districts and schools*
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4550

Suggest electronic copies for all team members AND one or more paper copies for each team.

Post-It notes and chart paper for the root-cause analysis work session.

AGENDA
Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline Work Session

This annotated agenda provides a suggested schedule for a three-hour work session, including a timeline, description, and list of accompanying resources and materials for each activity. This agenda is designed for work sessions attended by multiple school or district teams, but the activities could easily be used to coach a single team. In preparing for any work session, you should adjust the schedule to match the number of participants and their content knowledge and experience level.

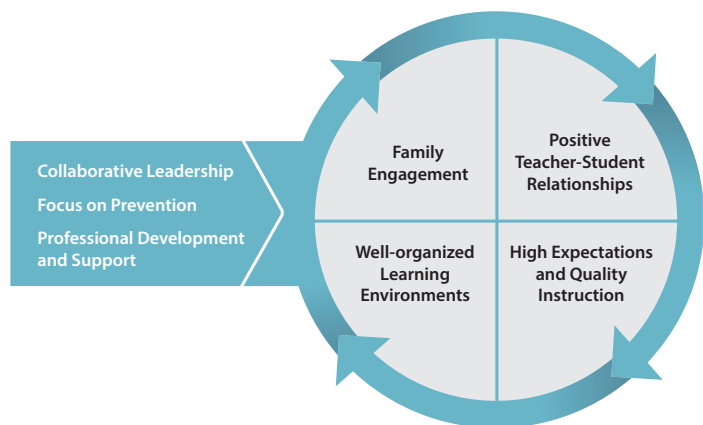| Minutes	Activity and description	Resources/materials
5	Introductions Review agenda and objectives	Slides 1–4
10	Suggested icebreaker activity	Slide 5
	Why improving school discipline is important	Slides 6–9
	Plan-Do-Study-Act	Slides 10–12
25	Review school and classroom strategies associated with lower suspension rates	Handout 1 Handout 2
	Handout 1: *What the research says about school and classroom practices.* Explain that the information brief shares research on school and classroom practices associated with lower suspension rates for highly diverse schools.	Slides 13–24
	Handout 2: *School and classroom strategies.* Divide the participants into four small groups. Assign each group a classroom practice sheet to discuss (10 minutes). Use slides 13–18 to guide a share-out of group discussions.	
45	Work session: Root-cause analysis 1. Define root-cause analysis and review directions on the slides	Slides 11–17
15	Break	
60	Work session: Identifying evidence-based practices or innovations	Handout 3
	Share Handout 3: Resources for creating an action plan	Slides 40–42
20	Ask teams to answer the following questions about the work session: • What has been one benefit of today's work session? • What is a challenge you have encountered and how might you solve it? • What is one step you can take to gather additional data or to begin implementing improvement strategies?	Slide 43 Participant evaluation

What the Research Says About School and Classroom Practices

Improving school discipline practices is a process, not a program. The process of using data and evidence to inform school improvement requires an understanding of evidence-based practices. One of the first questions your team should ask is 'What does the research say about practices that address disproportionate discipline?'

Below are seven practices that are associated with lower rates of suspension overall and for students of color in particular. Three of the practices describe organizational factors: collaborative leadership, policies and practices that focus on prevention, and resources to support teachers and students. Four practices focus on strategies that promote welcoming and caring school communities.

Lead through collaboration and by example. The policies and actions of school leaders influence school climate, how staff members interact with students, and teachers' classroom management practices. All stakeholders should have the goal of promoting a welcoming and caring school climate for all students—a major component of which is building and sustaining a culture that embraces diversity (something that requires strong leadership and a shared commitment to equity among all staff members). Promoting a welcoming and caring school climate for all students, however, requires the collaboration and engagement not only of school leaders and staff members but also of parents and students (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Murkuria, 2002).

Focus on preventive and proactive school discipline practices. Prevention is the most effective way to eliminate disparities in school discipline. Prevention can mean many things. For example, research has shown that schools have fewer discipline problems when students believe the school is safe and that rules are enforced fairly (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011; Murkuria, 2002; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Way, 2011). Further, teachers who work to prevent discipline problems, as opposed to strictly enforcing school rules, give fewer discipline referrals to

Collaborative Leadership
Focus on Prevention
Professional Development and Support

Family Engagement

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Well-organized Learning Environments

High Expectations and Quality Instruction

students (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Way, 2011). In addition, schools with low rates of suspension are more likely to use restorative practices, such as referrals to school counselors, conferences with students and parents, restitution, and community service (Payne & Welch, 2010; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). In contrast, schools with high suspension rates are more likely to suspend students for behavior issues, and their use of alternatives to suspensions is limited.

There are many ways to address discipline concerns while also keeping students in school. As shown in the table below, nonexclusionary discipline practices include mild and restorative practices that may help students learn or practice problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. , and some punitive practices that do not remove students from classroom instruction. These strategies may also include punitive consequences (e.g., detention or losing a privilege) that do not remove students from class-room instruction.

Continuum of discipline practices

Mild
- Student conference
- Parent conference
- Verbal reprimand
- Visit with counselor

Restorative
- Restitution
- Community service
- Work duties or tasks

Punitive
- Suspension
- In-school suspension
- Afterschool detention
- Saturday school
- Loss of privilege

Extreme punitive
- Court action
- Expulsion
- Notification of police
- Criminal charges

Source: Payne & Welch, 2010.

Professional development and support. Schools that provide more support to students have lower rates of disproportionate suspensions for students of color (Eitle & Eitle, 2004). For example, students who receive individualized academic or social-emotional learning instruction are better able to succeed in school (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Additionally, teachers who receive resources for addressing classroom discipline concerns also have lower rates of out-of-school suspension (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Examples of these resources include additional professional development, coaching, and opportunities to access assistance or consultation as needed.

Positive teacher-student relationships. High-quality teacher-student relationships are associated with smaller discipline gaps and lower suspension rates for students of color (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Murkuria, 2002; Way, 2011). They are also a core element of excellent instruction and student engagement. Teachers and other educators can build positive, caring relationships with students by:
- Showing interest in their welfare.
- Wanting them to succeed.
- Being sensitive to their academic and social needs.
- Respecting their perspectives.
- Giving them positive recognition.

(Brackett et al., 2011; Tobin & Vincent, 2011)

High expectations for students. Teachers and administrators who set high academic and behavioral expectations for students of color have fewer classroom management problems (Brackett et al., 2011; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory, Cornell et al., 2011; Murkuria, 2002). These teachers and administrators are also very vocal about their beliefs that all students—including students of color—can succeed in school (Murkuria, 2002; Way, 2011). In addition, effective teachers show students they believe in them by using instructional strategies that require active learning and encourage higher-order thinking (Brackett et al., 2011).

Structured learning environments. Teachers who have classroom agreements on how students will enter or leave class, turn in work, participate in discussions, or work with others give fewer referrals (Murkuria, 2002; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Additionally, in positive learning environments, students receive recognition in many ways for a wide range of successes, not just for academic and athletic achievements.

Family and community engagement. Parents can be a tremendous help in developing school discipline plans that respect the many cultures in your school community (Murkuria, 2002; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Accordingly, schools with low suspension rates have leaders who believe strong school-family partnerships reduce discipline problems. Staff members in schools with low suspension rates involve parents early and discuss discipline concerns before issuing an office referral to students (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002).

Limitations

This information brief describes discipline practices that are associated with lower suspension rates. However, it should not be used as the sole information source for developing school or district improvement plans. An effective and sustainable school practice must be a good contextual fit that targets a specific need and assimilates with the culture of your school. We hope this summary will help inform policymakers and educators about practices associated with reduced discipline referrals and, more important, disproportionate suspension rates among student groups, including students of color and students receiving special education services.
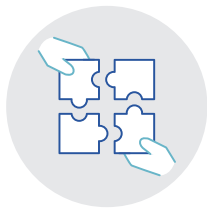
School and Classroom Strategies

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Read the following description of the school or district strategy your team selected then prepare a brief presentation that includes the information.

Description of the strategy

High-quality teacher-student relationships are associated with smaller discipline gaps and lower suspension rates for students of color (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Murkuria, 2002; Way, 2011). They are also a core element of excellent instruction and student engagement. Teachers and other educators can build positive, caring relationships with students by:

- Showing interest in their welfare.
- Wanting them to succeed.
- Being sensitive to their academic and social needs.
- Respecting their perspectives.
- Giving them positive recognition.

(Brackett et al., 2011; Tobin & Vincent, 2011)

What are some approaches that could improve this strategy in your school?

What are the benefits and challenges of planning and implementing improvements to this strategy?

High Expectations for Students

Read the following description of the school or district strategy your team selected then prepare a brief presentation that includes the information.

Description of the strategy

Teachers and administrators who set high academic and behavioral expectations for students of color have fewer classroom management problems (Brackett et al., 2011; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory, Cornell et al., 2011; Murkuria, 2002). These teachers and administrators are also very vocal about their beliefs that all students can succeed in school (Murkuria, 2002; Way, 2011). In addition, effective teachers show students they believe in them by using instructional strategies that require active learning and encourage higher-order thinking (Brackett et al., 2011).

What are some approaches that could improve this strategy in your school?

What are the benefits and challenges of planning and implementing improvements to this strategy?

Structured Learning Environments

Read the following description of the school or district strategy your team selected then prepare a brief presentation that includes the information.

Description of the strategy

Teachers who have classroom agreements on how students will enter or leave class, turn in work, participate in discussions, or work with others give fewer referrals (Murkuria, 2002; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Additionally, in positive learning environments, students receive recognition in many ways for a wide range of successes, not just for academic and athletic achievements.

What are some approaches that could improve this strategy in your school?

What are the benefits and challenges of planning and implementing improvements to this strategy?

Family and Community Engagement

Read the following description of the school or district strategy your team selected then prepare a brief presentation that includes the information.

Description of the strategy

Parents can be a tremendous help in developing school discipline plans that respect the many cultures in your school community (Murkuria, 2002; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Accordingly, schools with low suspension rates have leaders who believe strong school-family partnerships reduce discipline problems. Principals of schools with low suspension rates and high academic achievement describe parent engagement as the "most effective way of dealing with disciplinary challenges" (*Murkuria, 2002, p.445*). Staff members in schools with low suspension rates involve parents early and discuss discipline concerns before issuing an office referral to students (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002).

What are some approaches that could improve this strategy in your school?

What are the benefits and challenges of planning and implementing improvements to this strategy?

HANDOUT 3

Resources for Creating an Action Plan

It's never too early to start creating an action plan. This handout includes guiding questions that will help your school or district team start thinking about the actions it will take. We also include a list of web resources that provide information on school climate and discipline.

Guiding questions for creating an action plan

1. What are you trying to accomplish? Your discussion should focus on components of SMART goals—that is, specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound. Focus on choosing a goal that is based on existing data and relevant to your district's priorities.

2. What intervention or innovation could address your discipline concern? What would it take to implement the intervention (e.g., funding, staffing, time requirements, materials, and other resources)?

3. How will you know whether a new strategy is working for all students? What data would you use to measure progress toward your desired goal? How will you evaluate whether the strategy is being implemented with fidelity? How often will you review data and which student groups will you look at separately?

4. If the data show little to no improvement, how will you make improvement decisions? What data will you use?

Web Resources

- AIR provides research, toolkits, and resources that support educators' efforts to implement equitable school discipline. The website includes information on multiple topics, including school and district improvement, social- emotional learning, educator effectiveness, and youth-serving systems. http://www.air.org/topic/p-12-education-and-social-development/school-discipline

- The National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline provides resources, tools, information, and fact sheets on positive approaches to school discipline. Topics include restorative justice, positive behavioral interventions and supports, conditions for learning, social-emotional learning, and evidence-based practices. http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/

- The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments provides tools, research reports, and technical assistance events on school climate, preventing and responding to discriminatory behavior at school, responding to trauma in K–12 schools, social-emotional learning, and resilience. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/

- The Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports provides research, professional development resources, and tools to support implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports in schools. The website also provides information on training and technical assistance resources to incorporate equity in school discipline practices. http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis

- The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences provides practice guides, intervention reports, single study reviews, and quick reviews of recent research on many topics relevant to early childhood and K–12 education. The website includes products and services provided by the What Works Clearinghouse, the Regional Educational Laboratory Program, the Education Resources Information Center, and national data resources. http://ies.ed.gov/sites.asp

- The "School Climate and Discipline" section of the U.S. Department of Education's website provides information on resources, research, webinars, data tools, and policies related to school climate and discipline in early childhood and K–12 settings. It also includes several compendiums on evidence-based school and classroom practices. http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html

- The U.S. Department of Justice provides civil rights guidance and resources to schools, including a series of Dear Colleague Letters that provide answers to states, school districts, parents, and community members on their obligation under federal law to provide equal educational opportunities to each child. The website also provides resources on evidence-based school and classroom practices to address disproportionate discipline. https://www.justice.gov/crt/guidance-and-resources

About the *Training Guide for Using Data to Promote Equity in School Discipline* Series

REL Northwest developed this series of training and work session materials to help schools and districts improve their school discipline policies and practices. Specifically, the series provides guidance on using data to identify areas of concern related to the overuse of exclusionary discipline or disproportionality in assigning discipline to student groups, such as students of color or students with disabilities. The series also helps teams use evidence to identify interventions, develop an action plan, track their effectiveness, and inform improvement decisions.

There are five parts in this series: a planning guide and facilitation materials for four work sessions, each of which is described below. The work session materials are designed to be flexible and modular. Schools or districts that are in the beginning stages of improving their school discipline may find all the work sessions useful. Other schools or districts that are already using evidence-based school discipline systems and/or regularly using data to guide school discipline improvement may only need selected work sessions—or even parts of a session—to address specific needs. The materials available in this series include:

- *Introduction: Planning and Facilitating Work Sessions to Improve School Discipline*
- *Work Session: Revising School Discipline Policies and Procedures to Promote Equity*
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