

Are State Policy Reforms in Oregon Associated with Fewer School Suspensions and Expulsions?

In 2013 and 2015, Oregon enacted policy reforms aimed at changing the way school discipline is applied in grades K–12. The 2013 policy reforms directed districts to shift from a zero-tolerance approach to one that emphasizes prevention and reducing exclusionary discipline (i.e., out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, and expulsions). The 2015 policy reforms further limited the use of out-of-school suspensions in grades K–5 to situations that pose a risk to the safety of students or school employees. In a **recent study**, the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest examined the association between Oregon’s policy reforms and exclusionary discipline rates in grades K–5, 6–8, and 9–12 from 2008/09 to 2016/17. This infographic spotlights study findings related to out-of-school suspensions—specifically, whether they decreased over the study period and whether reductions were associated with Oregon’s policy reforms. The infographic also shares findings about the associations between the policy reforms and changes in expulsions and in-school suspensions.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Students who experience exclusionary discipline are at higher risk of chronic absenteeism, academic failure, and poor relationships with teachers and peers (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Over the long term, exclusionary discipline increases the risk of school dropout, delinquency, and substance abuse (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015; Fabelo et al., 2011; Hinze-Pifer & Sartain, 2018; Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015).

WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW



What were the changes over time in the annual number of out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, and expulsions per 100 students?



Were the changes associated with the timing of the school discipline policy reforms, even after adjusting for other factors (such as pre-policy trends, seasonality, and district characteristics) that might have changed over the study period?



What were the changes by behavioral infraction categories¹ (especially minor infractions and possession of weapons) that resulted in exclusionary discipline after adjusting for other factors?

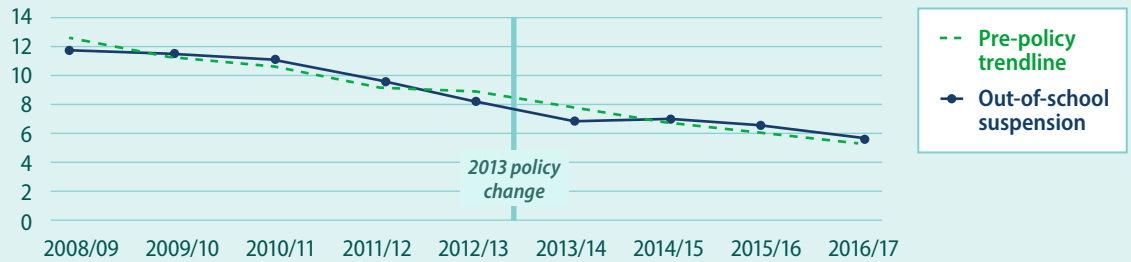
WHAT WE LEARNED



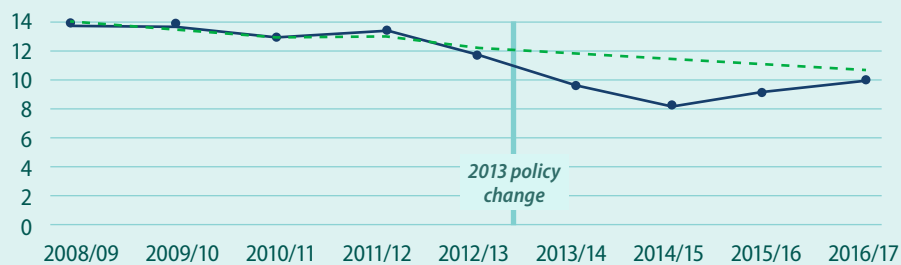
Out-of-school suspensions declined in Oregon from 2008/09 to 2016/17, especially for grades 9–12 and 6–8.

The reductions in the number of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students were substantial for grades 9–12 and 6–8, but reductions were small for grades K–5.

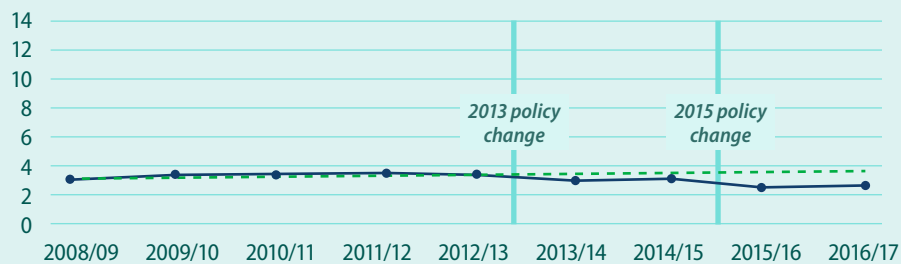
Number of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students, grades 9–12



Number of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students, grades 6–8



Number of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students, grades K–5



Note: To determine whether changes in exclusionary discipline were associated with Oregon’s policy reforms, the study team conducted regression analyses, which adjusted for other factors that could have affected changes in exclusionary discipline (such as pre-policy trends, seasonality, and district characteristics). See the [full report](#) for more information.



Oregon’s policy reforms were associated with reductions in out-of-school suspensions for all grade spans. But for some grade spans, these reductions were not sustained over time.

For grades 9–12 and 6–8, the 2013 policy reforms were associated with short-term reductions in the numbers of out-of-school suspensions per student. However, the changes were not sustained.

For grades K–5 only, the 2015 policy reforms were associated with initial reductions in the number of out-of-school suspensions per student.





Oregon's policy reforms were associated with some reductions in out-of-school suspensions for different behavioral infractions,¹ after adjusting for other factors.



For *aggression infractions*, the state policy reforms were associated with reductions in the number of out-of-school suspensions for all grade spans. For grades 9–12 and 6–8, these reductions were short-term and reverted to pre-policy trends in post-policy years.



For *minor infractions*, the state policy reforms were associated with short-term reductions in out-of-school suspensions for grades K–5 and 6–8, but not grades 9–12.



For *possession of weapons*, the state policy reforms were associated with short-term reductions in out-of-school suspensions for grades 6–8, but not for grades 9–12 (analysis was not conducted for weapons violations for grades K–5).



For *in-school suspensions*, Oregon's policy reforms were not associated with reductions in the use of in-school suspensions in any grade span.

For *expulsions*, Oregon's policy reforms were associated with reductions in expulsions for grades K–5 and 6–8, but not for grades 9–12.

WHAT NOW?

State and local education agencies may consider helping schools take the following actions:

1. Monitor trends in exclusionary discipline and intervention implementation to ensure that progress in reducing exclusionary discipline continues over time.
2. Investigate exclusionary discipline practices to identify root causes and contextual factors in an effort to select and implement appropriate interventions.
3. Implement strategies that will reduce unnecessary suspensions for minor infractions. These strategies may include having conferences with students and families, teaching social and emotional learning skills, providing additional academic support, and/or using restorative justice approaches.

RESOURCES

Additional research, infographics, videos, and other discipline-related resources are available from **REL Northwest** and the **REL program**.

REFERENCES

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- 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>.
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ENDNOTE

¹ In the **REL Northwest report**, behavioral infractions were organized into five categories.

- 1. Minor infractions:** Behaviors that do not pose a direct threat to the physical safety of others, including disorderly conduct, insubordination, obscene gestures, and violations of school rules.
- 2. Aggression infractions:** Verbal threats, fighting, harassment, sexual harassment, physical altercations, and intimidation causing fear of harm.
- 3. Property or drug infractions:** Theft; trespassing; burglary; vandalism; and possession or use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- 4. Major offenses:** Behaviors that pose a risk to the safety of others, including possession of weapons, arson, battery, sexual offenses, robbery, manufacturing or delivery of a controlled substance, kidnapping, and school threat.
- 5. Other infractions:** Disciplinary problems that do not match the other behavioral infraction definitions.