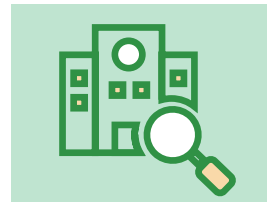


Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest Making Equitable Schools Audit Partnership

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest is partnering with school, district, and community leaders in Ohio to improve high school students' sense of belonging and perceptions of safety and support in school.



To achieve this goal, the **Making Equitable Schools Audit (MESA)** partnership will develop, test, and refine an approach for using data to collaboratively examine **sense of belonging**, climate and culture, the use of **exclusionary discipline**, and student outcomes at the high school level. Using this approach, school and community leaders will identify and implement changes to existing policies, programs, and practices to ensure that all members of the school community—including students, teachers, and staff—experience a safe and supportive school environment.



Sense of belonging refers to the extent to which students feel personally accepted, included, and supported at school¹ and includes school-based relationships and experiences, student-teacher relationships, and students' overall feelings about school.²



Exclusionary discipline refers to disciplinary actions that remove students from the classroom, including suspensions, expulsions, removals, and permanent exclusions (permanent removal from the Ohio public school system).³

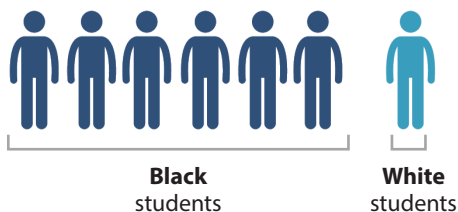
Why is this topic important?

Students learn best when they feel physically and emotionally safe, connected to school, challenged academically, and respected by adults. However, many students—especially students of color and students who receive special education services—report they do not feel safe and supported at school.⁴

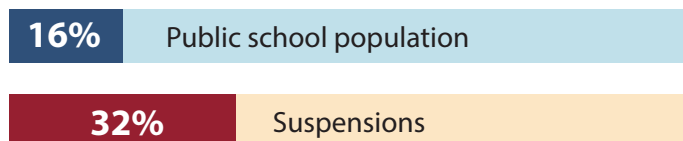
Student experiences with discipline can affect their perceptions of safety and support in school.⁵

Research shows that discipline is often not a neutral process and may be influenced by implicit bias.⁶ Schools must intentionally reconsider their policies and practices to reduce inequitable rates of school discipline and support all students.

Black students in Ohio public schools are **6 times** more likely to be disciplined than White students.⁷



Students with disabilities are **16 percent** of Ohio's public school population but account for **32 percent** of suspensions.⁸

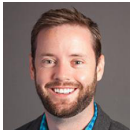


Planned partnership activities

The MESA partnership is working with **Akron Public Schools** to develop, implement, test, and refine an approach designed to address inequities in school discipline. This approach will bring together school community members over the course of one semester to examine data, openly discuss equity gaps, explore solutions, and develop a plan to promote equitable discipline.⁹ Ongoing leadership coaching will support the implementation of the plan. In addition, the partnership will conduct studies to better understand and improve the usability, feasibility, and acceptability of the MESA approach and to examine its impact on students and schools.

Visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) to learn more as the work unfolds.

Contact us to learn more!



Kyle Fagan, Partnership Director
kfagan@air.org



Jameela Conway-Turner, Partnership Manager
jconway-turner@air.org

REL Midwest is part of a network of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. REL Midwest works in partnership with practitioners in seven midwestern states to support the use of research and data to improve student outcomes, with a focus on students who are farthest from opportunity.

REL Midwest

10 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 600 • Chicago, IL 60606



ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/region/midwest



[@RELMidwest](https://twitter.com/RELMidwest)



relmidwest@air.org

This material was prepared under Contract 91990022C0011 by Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, administered by the American Institutes for Research. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

¹ Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>

² Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>

³ Ohio Department of Education. (2021). *Ohio compilation of school discipline laws and regulations*.

⁴ Chang, H. N., Osher, D., Schanfield, M., Sundius, J., & Bauer, L. (2019). Using chronic absence data to improve conditions for learning. Attendance Works and American Institutes for Research. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED602448>; Cleveland Metropolitan School District. (2019).

⁵ Lacoë, J. R. (2015). *Unequally safe: The race gap in school safety* (Working Paper #01-13). Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED556787>

⁶ Gullo, G. L., & Beachum, F. D. (2020). Does implicit bias matter at the administrative level? A study of principal implicit bias and the racial discipline severity gap. *Teachers College Record*, 122(3), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012200309>; Staats, C. (2014). *Implicit racial bias and school discipline disparities: Exploring the connection* (Kirwan Institute Special Report). Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University. <https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2014-05//ki-ib-argument-piece03.pdf>; National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2020). *Significant disproportionality in special education: Current trends and actions for impact*. https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-NCLD-Disproportionality_Trends-and-Actions-for-Impact_FINAL-1.pdf

⁷ Sweigart, J. (2018, August 26). Disproportionate discipline keeping Black kids out of school more often in Dayton schools. *Dayton Daily News*. <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/disproportional-discipline-keeping-black-kids-out-school-more-often-dayton-schools/LFCkqosFfhcEfV3V49zXl/>

⁸ Paxson, A. (2021). *The state of school discipline in Ohio*. Children's Defense Fund Ohio. <https://cdfohio.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/06/The-State-of-School-Discipline-in-Ohio-6.9.2021-Final.pdf>

⁹ Skrla, L., McKenzie, K. B., & Scheurich, J. J. (Eds.) (2009). *Using equity audits to create equitable and excellent schools*. Sage.