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# Suspension and expulsion patterns in six Oregon school districts

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## Key findings

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This study of student suspension and expulsion in six diverse school districts in Oregon in 2011/12 finds that:

- Some 6.4 percent of students were suspended or expelled from school. The most common reasons were physical and verbal aggression and insubordination/disruption.
- Nearly 40 percent of students who were suspended received more than one suspension.
- The average number of school days suspended among students receiving at least one suspension was 3.3 days.

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## Summary

Concern about the loss of classroom instruction resulting from school disciplinary actions has motivated many states and districts to review their use of student suspension and expulsion (exclusionary discipline), which has increased over the last four decades. In 2009/10, 2.4 percent of elementary school students and 11.3 percent of secondary school students across the country were suspended, up from 0.9 percent and 8 percent in 1972/73 (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

The intent of exclusionary discipline is to maintain safe and orderly schools. However, there is no evidence that imposing exclusionary discipline on more students has increased school safety, improved learning climates in schools, or improved the behavior of students receiving such discipline (American Psychological Association, 2008). In fact, the increased use of exclusionary discipline has been accompanied by undesirable consequences for both students and schools.

For example, gaps in percentages of White and racial/ethnic minority students receiving discipline have widened (Losen & Martinez, 2013). In addition, schools with a higher percentage of students receiving exclusionary discipline have lower levels of academic achievement (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002) and environments less conducive to learning (Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, exclusionary discipline is associated with poorer outcomes for students. Students who are suspended are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out, and become involved in the juvenile justice system (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011).

While there is no evidence that exclusionary discipline causes these school- or student-level problems, this type of discipline usually results in loss of instruction time that students can ill afford. These dual concerns—that exclusionary discipline fails to improve learning environments in schools and that it is associated with poorer outcomes for students—have prompted action at the federal and state levels to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline.

This study was conducted in response to the Oregon Leadership Network's request to Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest to identify how frequently students in six selected districts received exclusionary discipline during the 2011/12 school year, the most common reasons for such discipline, the percentage of students receiving multiple suspensions, and how many school days students lost to suspensions. The districts collectively enroll 24 percent of K–12 public school students in Oregon and are among the most diverse in the state, serving 28 percent of Oregon's Hispanic students, 51 percent of its Asian students, and 55 percent of its Black students. In addition, the Oregon Leadership Network wanted information on the application of exclusionary discipline at different grade spans and by student gender, race/ethnicity, and special education status.

Among the key findings:

- During 2011/12, 6.4 percent of students were removed from regular classroom instruction because they were suspended or expelled.
- Out-of-school suspension was more common than in-school suspension in all grade spans (elementary, middle, and high school). The largest difference was in high school, where the percentage of students receiving out-of-school suspension was three times the percentage receiving in-school suspension.

- The percentage of students receiving exclusionary discipline was 2.5 times higher for male students than for female students. The percentage was higher for American Indian, Black, Hispanic, and multiracial students and lower for Asian students than for White students. And the percentage for students in special education was higher than that for students not in special education.
- Physical and verbal aggression and insubordination/disruption were the most common reasons why students were suspended or expelled.
  - Physical and verbal aggression was the most common reason for exclusionary discipline for students in elementary and middle school, and insubordination/disruption was the most common reason in high school.
  - The percentage of students receiving exclusionary discipline for physical and verbal aggression or for insubordination/disruption was higher for male students than for female students. The percentage was higher for racial/ethnic minority students, except Asian students, than for White students. And the percentage was higher for students in special education than for students not in special education.
- Nearly 40 percent of students who were suspended received more than one suspension over the school year.
  - Approximately 1 percent of elementary school students, 5 percent of middle school students, and 3 percent of high school students were suspended more than once.
  - The percentage of students receiving multiple suspensions was three times higher for male students than for female students. The percentage was higher for American Indian, Black, Hispanic, and multiracial students and lower for Asian students than for White students. And the percentage was four times higher for students in special education than for students not in special education.
- The average number of school days suspended among students receiving at least one suspension was 3.3 days.
  - The average number of school days suspended was 2.2 days in elementary school, 3.3 days in middle school, and 4.1 days in high school. It was roughly half a day greater for male students than for female students in elementary school and one day greater in high school; in middle school the difference was negligible.
  - In elementary school the average number of school days suspended was approximately one day greater for Black students than for White students and was slightly less for Asian and Hispanic students than for White students. In middle and high school the average was nearly the same across all races/ethnicities (except Asian students in middle school, for whom it was less).
  - In high school the average number of school days suspended was nearly the same for students in special education and for students not in special education. In elementary and middle school it was half a day greater for students in special education than for students not in special education.

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