

The Effect of Discipline Reform Plans on Exclusionary Discipline Outcomes in Minnesota

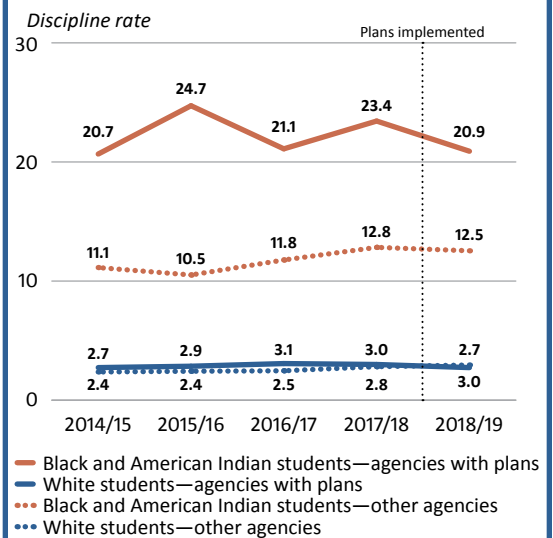
Exclusionary discipline practices (suspensions, exclusions, and expulsions) are assigned disproportionately to students of racial/ethnic minority backgrounds and students with disabilities.¹ In 2017 the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR) identified 43 local education agencies in the state as being in violation of the Minnesota Human Rights Act because of such disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices as well as overall use. MDHR agreed not to pursue legal action against any local education agency that created a plan to reform its discipline practices. MDHR’s leadership requested assistance from the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest to better understand the relationship between the creation of discipline reform plans and discipline outcomes for students.

Among the study implications is that some changes in practice, such as implementing evidence-based discipline reforms, are likely needed to end racial/ethnic disparities in exclusionary discipline. Such reforms could be identified through evidence clearinghouses like the What Works Clearinghouse (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>). Additional research is needed to identify which discipline reform plan strategies are most effective.

Key findings

- Differences in exclusionary discipline action rates by race/ethnicity and special education status were larger in local education agencies with discipline reform plans than in other local education agencies.** From 2014/15 (before creation of discipline reform plans) to 2018/19 (after creation of plans), White students experienced discipline actions at similar rates in local education agencies with discipline reform plans and in other local education agencies. However, American Indian and Black students experienced discipline actions at a higher rate in local education agencies with discipline reform plans than in other local education agencies (figure). Similar patterns emerged for students in special education and students not in special education.
- Creating a discipline reform plan was not associated with a statistically significant decline in exclusionary discipline actions in the 2018/19 school year.** After student and local education agency characteristics and trends in exclusionary discipline actions were accounted for, the change in probability of experiencing discipline actions was not clearly different on average in the 41 local education agencies with discipline reform plans than it was for students in comparison local education agencies.

Differences in exclusionary discipline action rates by race/ethnicity were larger in local education agencies with discipline reform plans than in other local education agencies over 2014/15–2018/19



Note: The sample consisted of 1,174,713 unique students in 510 local education agencies in Minnesota. The discipline rate is the number of discipline actions per 100 students. Local education agencies with discipline reform plans created the plans in 2017/18 and implemented the plans in 2018/19.

Source: Authors’ analysis of data provided by the Minnesota Department of Education.

1. Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 48–58. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ886493>.