



2024 STATE OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE IN OHIO

March 2024

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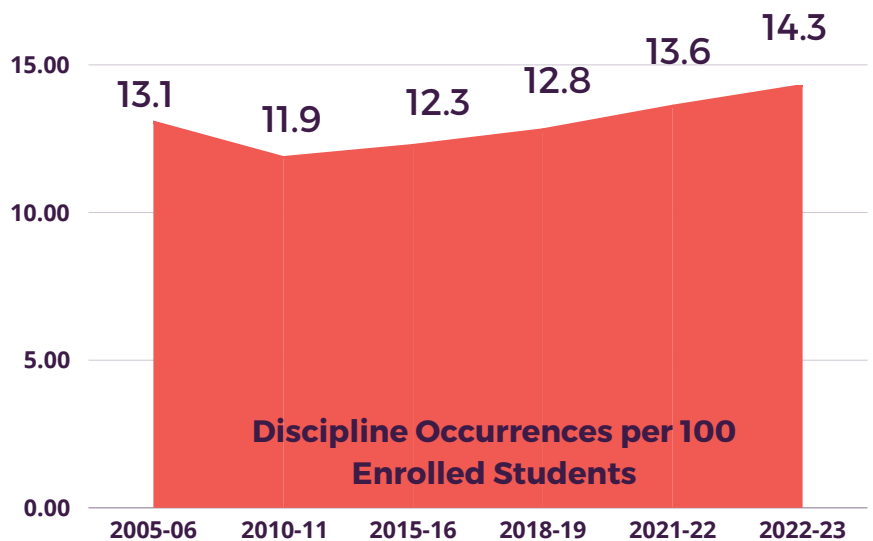
Executive Summary

Schools play a critical role in shaping the future of our youth and every child deserves a quality education and an opportunity to thrive and meet their full potential. However, exclusionary school discipline policies— discipline practices that exclude children from school— harm students and contribute to the community to prison pipeline, placing far too many children on a pathway to incarceration. Despite declines in occurrences in PK-3rd grade, exclusionary discipline practices are on the rise overall.

This report analyzes exclusionary school discipline rates and trends in Ohio’s public schools.

EXCLUSIONARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ARE ON THE RISE.

Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions are considered exclusionary school discipline because they exclude students from necessary learning time.



Data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Student Report Card. 2019-20 and 2020-21 were excluded because extended remote learning affected data. 2005-06 and 2010-11 data were added for reference.

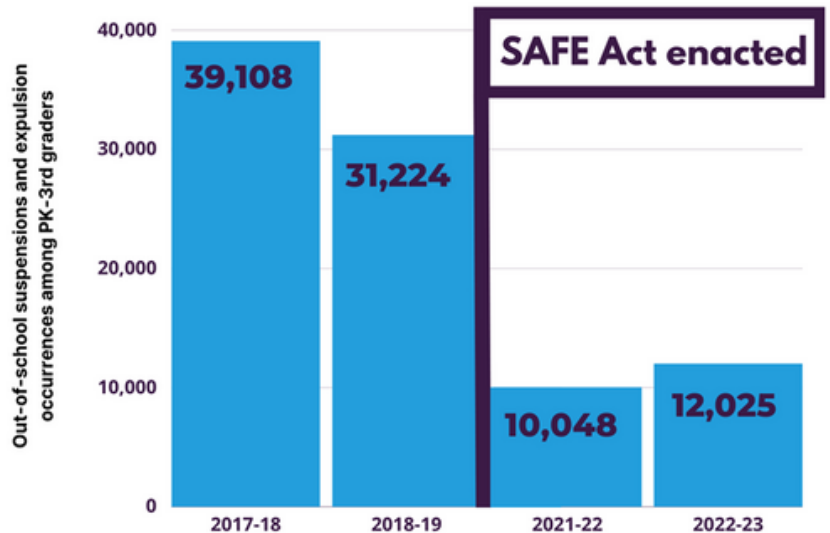
Exclusionary school discipline contributes to Ohio’s high chronic absenteeism

School discipline cannot be separated from Ohio’s alarmingly high chronic absenteeism rates. Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of school for any reason. Missing as little as 2-3 days per month can lead to chronic absence. Out-of-school suspensions contribute to the state’s high absenteeism rates. In fact, 26.8% of students, over 418,000 students, were chronically absent from school in the 2022-2023 school year, compared to 16.7%, or 268,000 students, in 2018-2019.



EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE HAS DECLINED FOR PK-3RD GRADERS SINCE NEW POLICIES WERE ENACTED IN THE “THE SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVES FOR FAIR EDUCATION” (SAFE) ACT. HOWEVER, THE FULL INTENT OF THE ACT HAS YET TO BE FULLY REALIZED.

Under the SAFE Act, the number of disciplinary actions not authorized as an “immediate health and safety exemption” should have been eliminated by 2021-2022. However, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce data reveals there were nearly 2,000 exclusionary discipline occurrences for PK-3rd graders for behavior that is not exempt.



Data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Student Report Card. 2019-20 and 2020-21 were excluded because extended remote learning affected data.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE HAS DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS

This report analyzes data on disparities in exclusionary discipline by race, ethnicity, poverty and economic disadvantage.

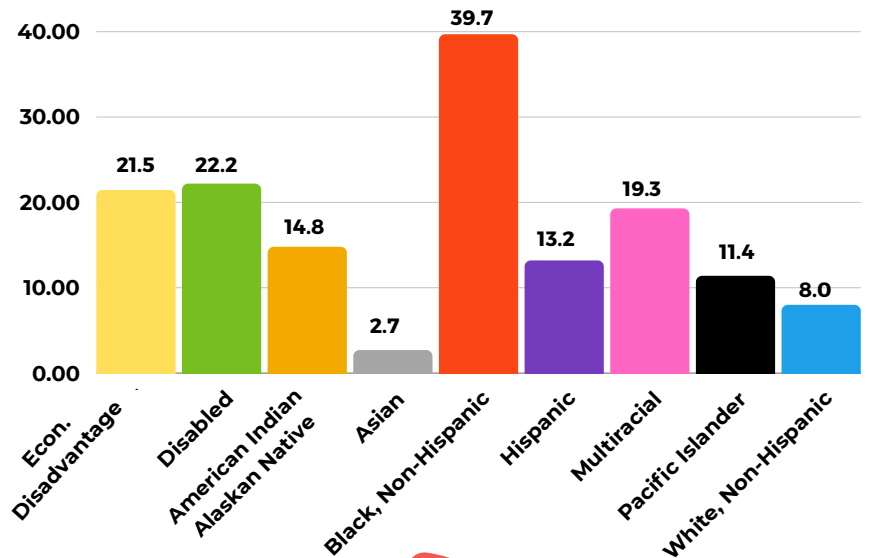
4.3x

Black male students were 4.3x more likely than white male students to be suspended or expelled.

6x

Black female students were 6x more likely than white female students to be suspended or expelled.

Discipline Occurrences per 100 Students in 2022-2023



Disparities also persist across socioeconomic status.

In 2022-2023 school year, there were 174,000 total suspension or expulsion occurrences of students who qualify as economically disadvantaged, compared to only 35,000 of students who do not qualify as economically disadvantaged.



Percent of expulsions of students who qualify as economically disadvantaged

RECOMMENDATIONS

If we continue to measure how well children surmount barriers rather than address the barriers themselves, we will continue to fall short in creating the supportive, safe, and welcoming environments that all children deserve. Lawmakers, school administrators and teachers, and community leaders can enhance policy and programmatic changes to school discipline policies that instead elevate whole child supports. Schools and communities must receive adequate funding and resources to see these recommendations become a sustainable reality for Ohio's students.

1

Expand the SAFE Act, investigate violations, and provide funding

Expanding the SAFE Act provisions to apply to more students would prevent the worst impacts of a zero tolerance mandate by protecting children from unnecessary exclusionary discipline. The SAFE Act and any expansion must be accompanied by significant funding for our schools to invest in alternative approaches and continue to prioritize classroom management.

2

Support educators with adequate funding

Educators must be empowered with adequate resources, both in terms of time and space, to offer students the support they need to thrive. Continue to fully fund our state's schools through the Fair School Funding Plan.

3

Engage the community, including parents and caregivers, teachers, and students

Hold listening sessions and focus groups with school administrators, teachers, parents and caregivers, and students, to better understand school discipline.

4

Address student needs through community learning center investments and supports

Improve the health of students and their families by dedicating state funding to expand access to school-based and community-connected health care.

5

Embed restorative practices within a PBIS Framework

Policymakers must understand the value of these time-intensive practices and ensure that districts have sufficient resources to embed time for them into the staff master schedule.

6

Implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programs

Evidence-based social emotional learning helps students develop critical life skills, achieve their goals, and be informed, active citizens.

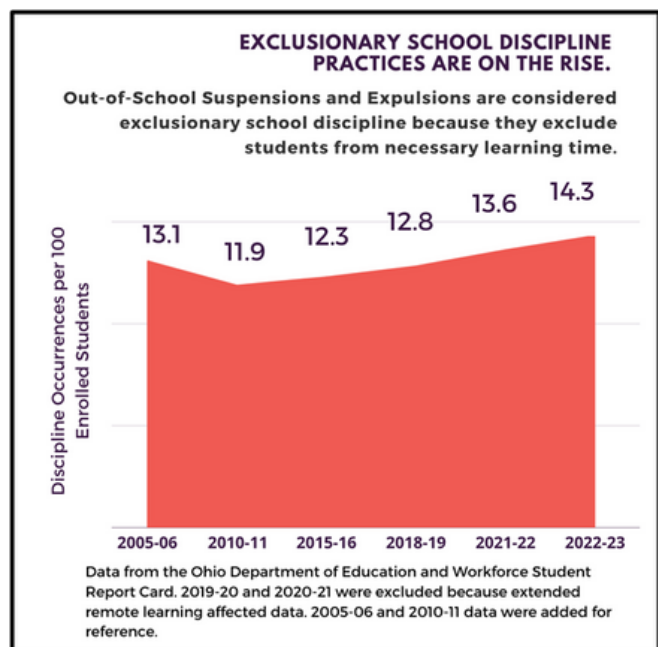
2024 STATE OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE IN OHIO

March 2024

As pillars of our communities, schools play a critical role in shaping our children's futures. Every child deserves a quality education and an opportunity to thrive and meet their full potential. However, exclusionary school discipline policies— discipline practices that remove children from the classroom and their usual school settings— harm students and contribute to the community-to-prison pipeline, putting far too many children on a pathway to incarceration.¹ **Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions rose in every grade level (PK-12) in the 2022-2023 school year in Ohio public schools from the prior 2021-2022 school year.**

This report describes the state of exclusionary school discipline practices in Ohio as a contributing factor to the community-to-prison pipeline. Exclusionary discipline practices are used disproportionately for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx children, as well as for students with disabilities. Exclusionary discipline also disproportionately impacts students from families who qualify as economically disadvantaged, a definition used by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce to include, among other things, students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

The pipeline begins with systemic community disinvestment, where a child's zip code significantly influences the resources and opportunities available, perpetuating generational poverty and opportunity gaps. Schools play an integral role in closing these gaps, but they can also contribute to the pipeline through unfair and unjust exclusionary discipline practices.



The Covid-19 pandemic has created additional challenges for our schools and students. Returning to the classroom has led to a number of additional barriers that our teachers are expected to help students overcome, placing immense pressure and additional workload on our teachers. Notably, these added job responsibilities are met without additional compensation or resources. And while many of our schools and school districts were able to hire additional staff or introduce programming to meet whole student needs through the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, these funding sources will soon expire. As a result, schools will be forced to make challenging decisions about resource and program cuts. Thus, it is imperative that this report and its recommendations be read with the understanding that school districts and school staff need additional and adequate funding and resources to effectively carry out the recommendations highlighted in this report.

This report builds on the Children Defense Fund-Ohio's (CDF-OH) history of research on education equity and the state of school discipline, which includes:

[The State of School Discipline in Ohio \(2021\)](#)

[School Resource Officers: Recommendations for Maximizing School Safety and Minimizing Risks to Ohio Children \(2018\)](#)

[School Discipline Policies and the Cradle to Prison Pipeline \(2017\)](#)

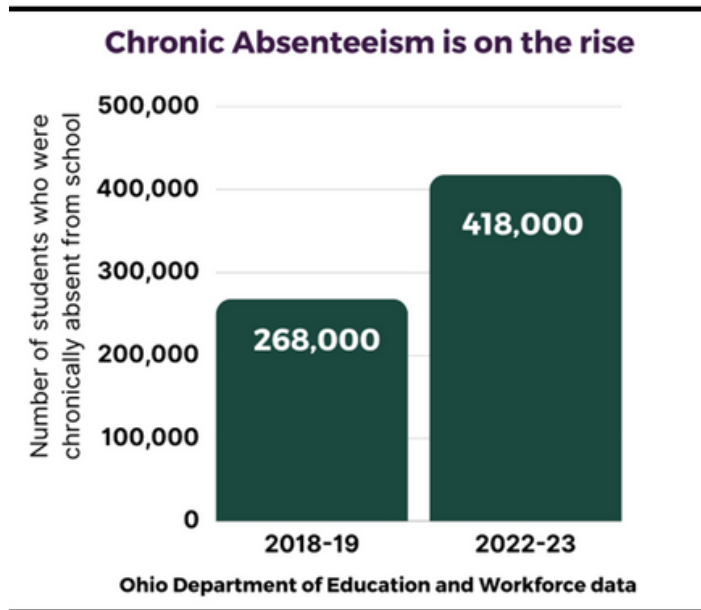
[Zero Tolerance and Exclusionary School Discipline Policies Harm Students and Contribute to the Cradle to Prison Pipeline \(2012\)](#)

Data in this report includes out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in its definition of exclusionary discipline. Exclusionary punishments prevent students from accessing valuable in-person learning and essential services that support their overall well-being, further widening the gap for those who need these services the most.

Community Engagement:

As part of this report, CDF-Ohio engaged with superintendents, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students to solicit their thoughts and ideas around this topic. We believe it is essential that their voice, the voice of those most impacted by exclusionary discipline, be part of the conversation and recommendations.

School discipline cannot be separated from Ohio’s alarmingly high chronic absenteeism rates. Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% of school or more, and can mean as little as missing 2-3 days per month. Out-of-school suspensions, for example, are counted as unexcused absences for students, contributing to the state’s high absenteeism rates.² Students in grades K-3 who were never chronically absent were 6.7 times more likely to pass the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, and high-school students who were never chronically absent were nine times more likely to graduate.³ Absenteeism affects all students—even those students who are in attendance. In fact, 26.8% of students, over 418,000 students, were chronically absent from school in the 2022-2023 school year, compared to 16.7%, or 268,000 students, in 2018-2019.



Every school has an opportunity to thoughtfully consider their school discipline procedures, including what constitutes an actionable behavior or activity and how that behavior is then addressed. School administrators must recognize that each out-of-school punishment results in both lost instructional time and limited access to wellness services and that denying these services further compounds the problem. With this in mind, schools should continually revisit and amend policies and practices related to school discipline to ensure they are student centered and not causing undue harm.

Background and History of “Zero Tolerance”

In 1998, Ohio lawmakers made changes to the Ohio Revised Code that required all public schools to adopt a “zero tolerance” policy for “violent, disruptive, or inappropriate behavior.”⁴ This mandate has posed challenges in ensuring fair disciplinary treatment for all students, and has contributed to the high rates of exclusionary practices. School districts vary in their application of the zero tolerance mandate, depending on how they define and interpret the words “disruptive” and “inappropriate.” As a result, school discipline policies became very rigid. Zero tolerance policies originated during the federal government’s “War on Drugs”, referring to the strategies, and strict punitive policies employed by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the American criminal justice system, such as: mandatory sentencing laws; “three strikes” laws; and “broken windows” theory.

Spurred on by the “tough on crime” rhetoric of the 1980’s and 1990’s, these policies gained traction and led to a narrative of criminalization that was soon applied to youth and young adults, leading to a spike in juvenile arrests in the early 1990’s. At the time, a new theory, the “superpredator” theory, emerged asserting that the United States was now facing a looming threat: a generation of young “superpredators” who were capable of unimaginable violence. This led to a national debate on public safety, one whose momentum collided with a historically pervasive and expansive backdrop of racism and white supremacy.

This theory ultimately rationalized the demonization and criminalization of Black and Brown children, especially boys and young men, and played a huge role in the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 meant to severely crack down on juvenile offenders and crime in K-12 schools. Fear mongering persisted, motivating political will for “zero tolerance” policies in schools. The Columbine High School Massacre in 1999 further cemented “zero tolerance” policy footholds in public education nationwide, which in turn, led to the suspension and expulsion of children at high and disparate rates, making them more likely to be involved in the justice system through the school, or the community-to-prison pipeline.

Zero tolerance policies over-disciplined for nonviolent infractions and contributed to the high rates of out-of-school discipline. While these policies may have been well-intended, the impact of lost instructional time is felt more by students whose families struggle to meet basic needs. These policies have disproportionately impacted students from families who are economically disadvantaged.

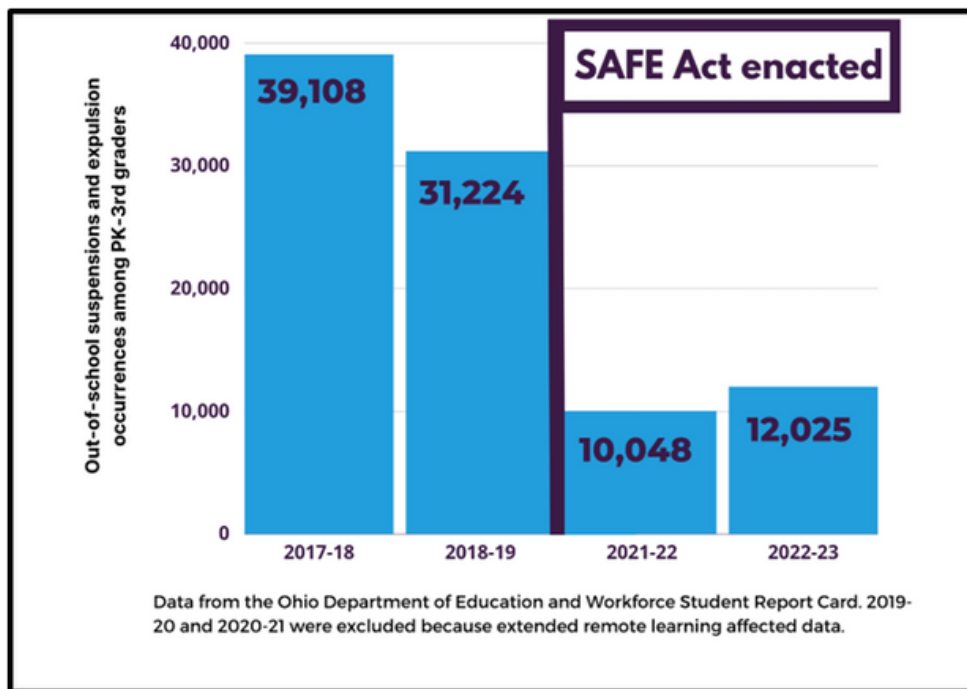
PARENT PERSPECTIVE

“As a Family Ambassador, I call families daily to check and connect with them around their well-being. Many of the contacted families stated their child was currently suspended or recently returned to school from suspension. I found it alarming that through randomly calling parents just to check on their well-being, resulted in discovering that many students were suspended. Moreover, my family would soon be impacted by the school’s zero-tolerance policy. My son, a junior, enrolled in college credit plus classes at the community college, an honor student his entire high school tenure, never been suspended, and very active in extracurricular activities was suspended for ten days for “horse-playing” after school before band practice.”

-Parent of High-School Student

Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education (SAFE) Act

In 2018, Ohio's school discipline policy was amended to address exclusionary discipline for young children through the Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education (SAFE) Act.⁵ The zero tolerance policy mandate remains in the Ohio Revised Code, but for young children, it is subject to the SAFE Act provisions prohibiting suspensions and expulsions except in limited circumstances. The SAFE Act is intended to limit the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for younger children by prohibiting schools from using exclusionary discipline for nonviolent or disruptive behavior for students in pre-kindergarten through the third grade, unless they pose significant danger to school and student safety. The goal of this law was to promote alternatives to harsh disciplinary measures to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment.



As the data above demonstrates, the SAFE Act appears to be working to limit and reduce exclusionary discipline practices for Pk-3rd graders, but further research is needed to understand the Act's full effect on classroom management and student outcomes.

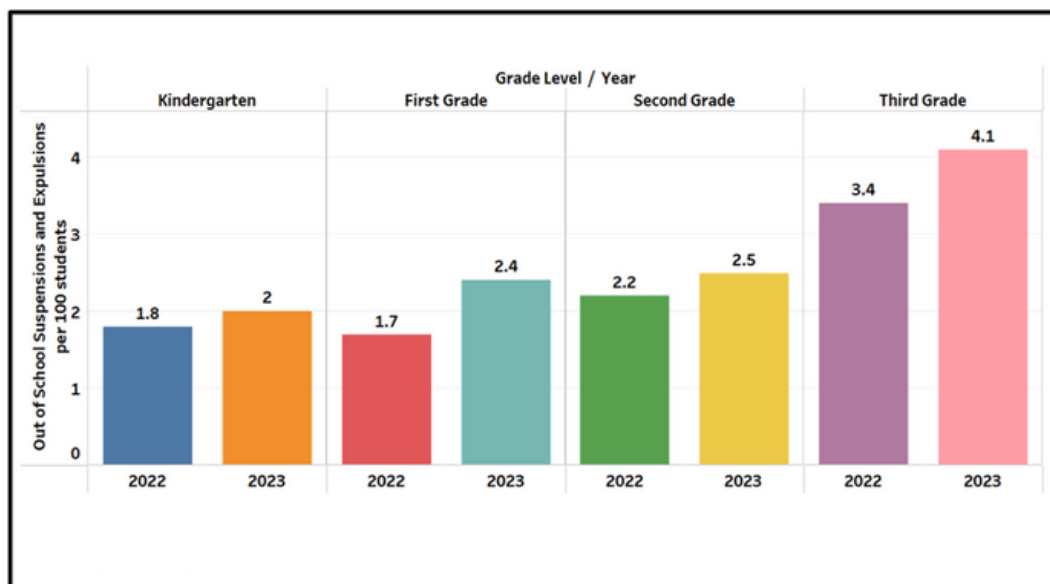
In order to provide districts with time to amend their policies and procedures in compliance with the SAFE Act, schools were allowed to gradually reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions or expulsions for PK-3rd grade students using the district's 2018-2019 school year data as a baseline.

Under the Act, the number of disciplinary actions that were not authorized as an “immediate health and safety exemption” should have been eliminated by 2021-2022. However, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce data reveals there were nearly 2,000 exclusionary discipline occurrences for PK-3rd graders for behavior that is not exempt.⁶

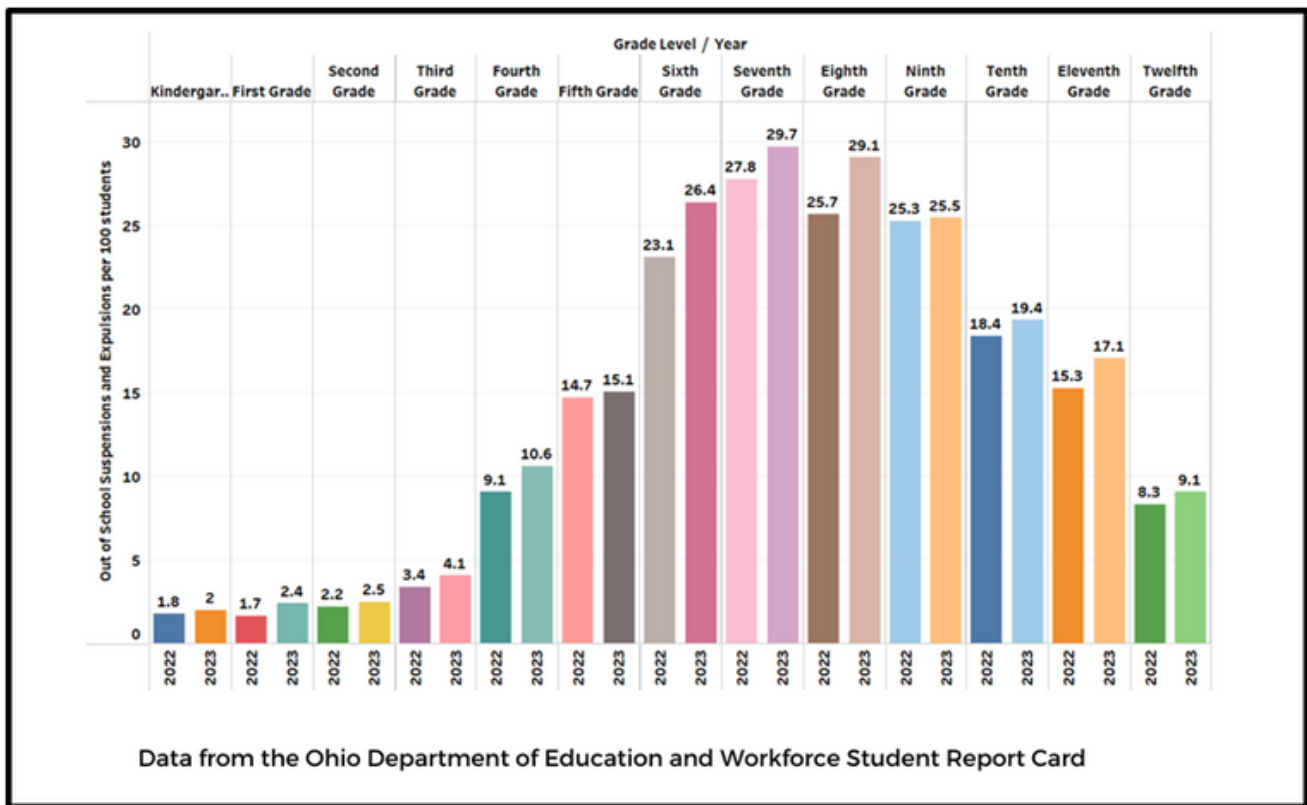
The SAFE Act has resulted in a significant decline of exclusionary discipline of PK-3rd graders since it passed in 2018, but rates ticked up again in 2022-2023. In the 2021-22 school year, there were around 10,000 total exclusionary discipline occurrences, down from 31,000 in 2018-2019 and 39,000 in 2017-2018. During the 2021-2022 school year, most schools were able to maintain a 5-day per week schedule, but note that school closures and attendance issues due to the pandemic may also contribute to the data. The SAFE Act has appeared to contribute to the reduction of out-of-school discipline for young children, but it is critical to investigate the nearly 2,000 occurrences that should have been prohibited under the act.

While the SAFE Act requires limiting the use of exclusionary discipline, it does not offer additional funding to support alternative behavior interventions. Positive behavior interventions require additional investment, and prohibiting exclusionary discipline must be accompanied by dedicated funding to provide alternatives. The SAFE Act and further expansion of its provisions must include dedicated funding and provide additional support needs to ensure that these mandates are implemented correctly. We recommend future research on the SAFE Act and its impacts on classroom management and learning, particularly in the PK-3rd grade classrooms where teachers are required to limit exclusionary discipline.

While the rate remains significantly lower than pre-SAFE Act phased-in implementation, exclusionary discipline occurrences of young children saw a slight increase in the 2022-23 school year from the 2021-2022 school year.



While the SAFE Act focused on young children, middle school is the time when students are most likely to experience exclusionary discipline. This is a critical period in a student's educational and personal development, representing a significant transition to a more complex educational environment. Students experience increased social awareness and identity development during middle school. Middle schoolers also transition from having one or a few educators to experiencing different teachers for the various subjects. The middle school model requires students to navigate different teaching styles, expectations, and classroom environments. All of these factors in combination create the potential for behavioral challenges. With these factors in mind and with adequate funding, schools can implement strategies to support students during this academic transition. **Exclusionary discipline occurrences were highest among middle school students.**



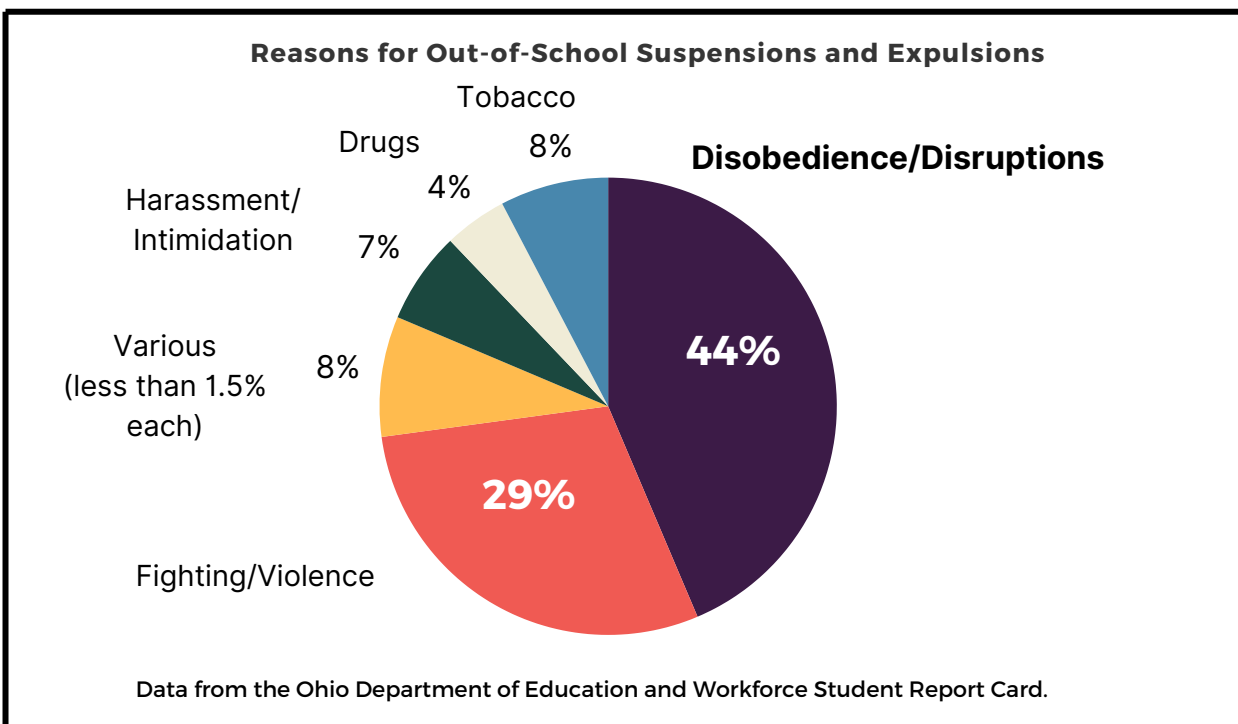
EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE:

“I don't like the number of suspensions we have at the Middle School. We need other options for counseling. We contract with a behavioral health service but they are limited and their personnel is spread thin.”

-Superintendent

Exclusionary discipline should be reserved for serious and violent offenses, which is the principle behind the SAFE Act. Yet, suspensions and expulsions are frequently applied to cases of minor misconduct, such as vaping on campus, or causing a disruption in the classroom. As a result, students face excessive discipline for nonviolent infractions like “disobedient and disruptive” behavior, dress code violations (often labeled as “intimidation”), and behaviors that are typical for children and adolescents.

Data from the 2022-2023 school year reveals that only 29% of infractions resulting in out-of-school punishment were for fighting or violence, while nearly half were attributed to “disobedient/disruptive behavior”. The interpretation of what constitutes “disruptive” or “disobedient” behavior is based on school professionals’ discretion and as a result, has broadened over time, leading to harsh and automatic sanctions for minor offenses beyond what is just or warranted. Numerous studies have also highlighted the link between educator and administrator bias and discretionary disciplinary decisions.⁷



Disruptive behavior may be connected to a student's unaddressed mental or behavioral health needs. Mental health needs have increased since the pandemic. The percentage of Ohio children ages 3 to 17 with anxiety or depression diagnosed by a doctor or health care provider increased by 42% between 2016 and 2020.⁸ Moreover, in many areas of Ohio, students' behavioral health needs cannot be fully met due to gaps (lack of services) in the continuum of care for children’s behavioral health.⁹ With proper funding, schools are better able to address students' behavioral health needs.

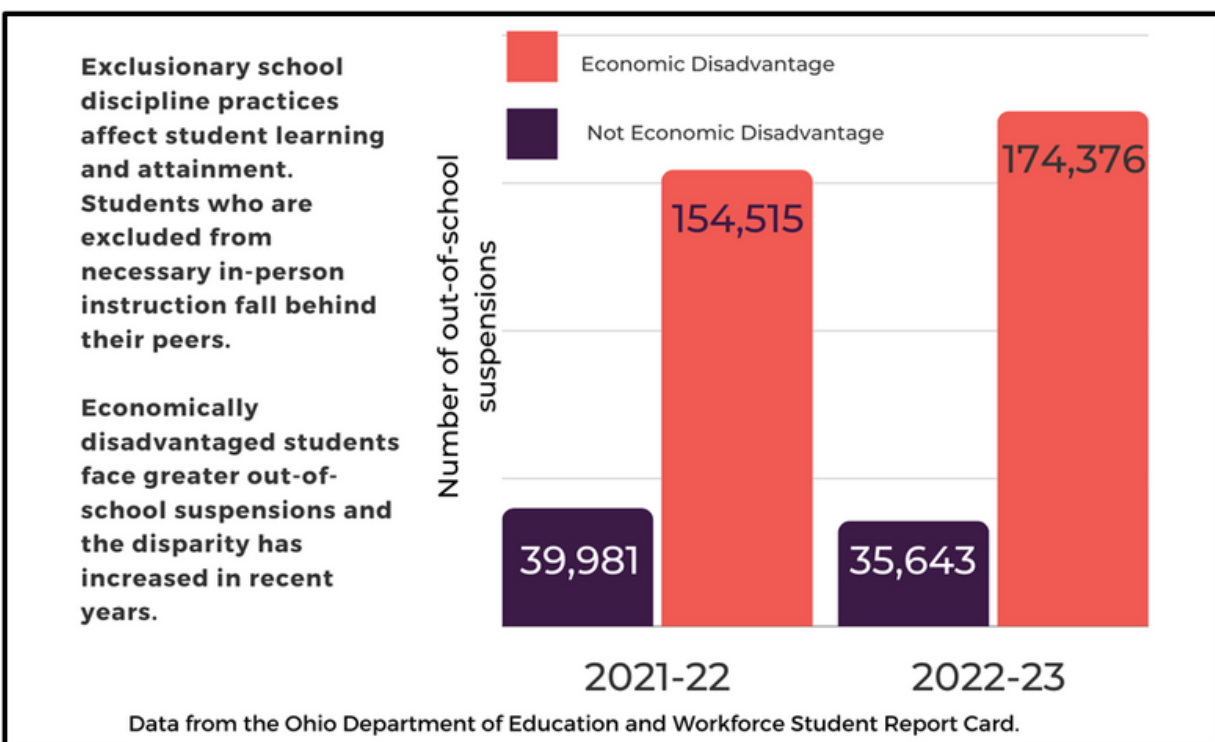
EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE:

“Many school districts are understaffed, especially in terms of the support staff that can help provide those restorative practices--intervention specialists, behavior specialists, school psychologists, counselors, ESL teachers, paraprofessionals, aides, social workers, tutors, and parent volunteers...Class sizes have a direct impact on the amount of disruptive behaviors that occur. Our school building had a significant reduction in discipline referrals when only half the amount of students were in the school building (due to the hybrid learning model). Students that were "frequent fliers" in our restorative practice system in the 2019-2020 school year were hardly ever pulled out of the classroom due to disruptive behavior in the 2020-2021 school year (when only half the students attended in-person each day), as the teacher was able to implement restorative practices in the classroom.”

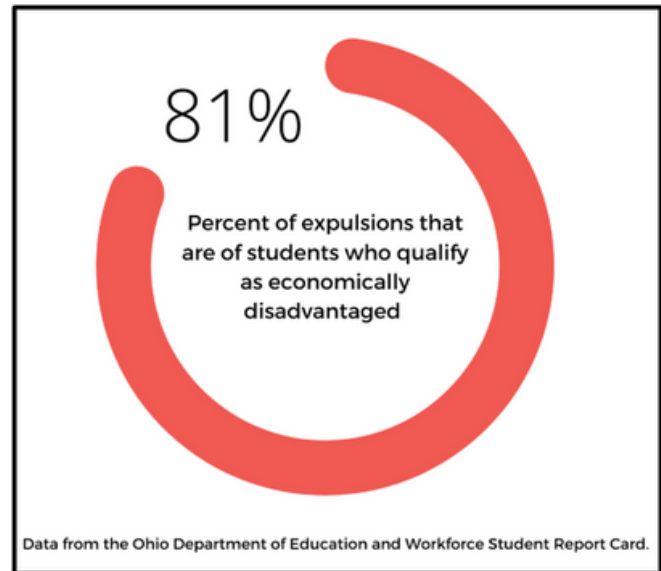
-Veteran Public School Interventionist

Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Poverty & Economic Disadvantage

Disparities in school discipline across race and family income persist. It is critical that policymakers, school administrators, and teachers utilize an intersectional lens to better understand how students' identities contribute to increased risk for harsh discipline, and ultimately, lost educational opportunity.



Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged students. Economically disadvantaged students face greater out-of-school suspensions than their peers and this disparity has increased in recent years. While economically disadvantaged students represent 50% of the total student population for public schools in Ohio, they represent 81% of school discipline occurrences that resulted in expulsion. This represents a 5 percentage point increase from the 2021-22 school year, where 76% of expulsions were of economically disadvantaged students. Similarly, economically disadvantaged students represented 83% of out-of-school suspensions in the 2022-2023 school year, a 4 percentage point rise from the 2021-2022 school year. Expulsion and out-of-school suspensions have serious impacts on student learning and outcomes.



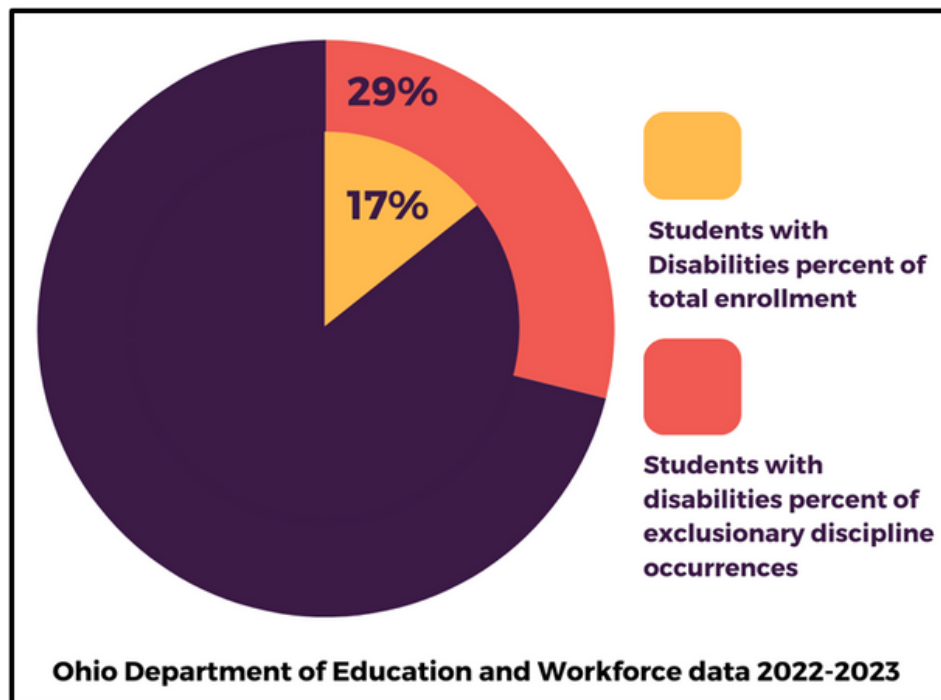
STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

“Exclusionary discipline...measures most directly affect minority students, creating pipelines that prepare them for jail cells rather than classrooms. As someone who grew up in a low-income community and a community of primarily immigrants, I experienced this lack of opportunity for change. While I believe that discipline is necessary, the disciplinary practices used in most schools seem to impose life sentences rather than provide opportunities for students to transform their lives. I had to search for opportunities for myself due to disinvestment in my community and education. Zero-tolerance policies hinder opportunities for students, as these policies are predominantly used in low-income communities.”
-High-School Student



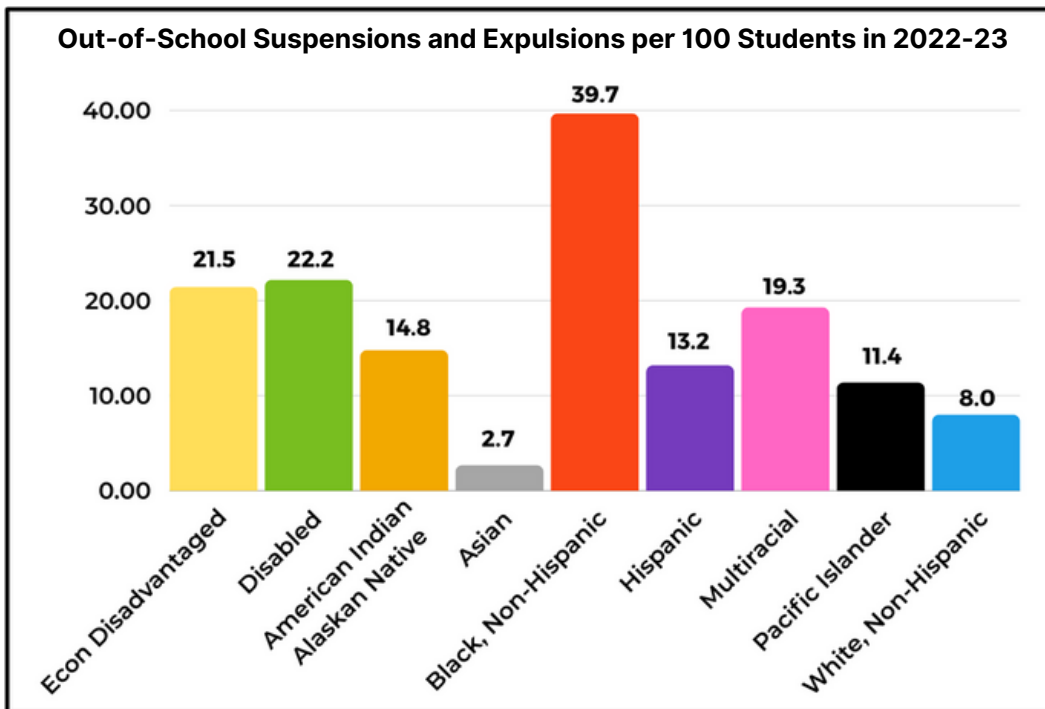
Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline. While students with disabilities represented just 17% of Ohio students enrolled in public schools in 2022-2023, they represented almost 30% of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. For students with disabilities to be adequately supported post-pandemic, it is critical that schools receive increased funding for students with disabilities.



Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Race & Ethnicity

Discipline rates ranged from 2.7 occurrences for Asian students to 39.7 occurrences for Black students per 100 students in the 2022-23 school year. National data from the Office of Civil Rights reports that Black students in Ohio lost over 279,000 days of instruction due to suspensions in the 2017-18 school year, while white students lost 220,000.¹⁰ In Ohio, Black students make up 16% of the student population, compared to white students who make up 70%. According to the Office of Civil Rights report, Ohio is among the states with the highest Black-White gap in days of lost instruction during the 2017-2018 school year, underscoring the significant impact of out-of-school discipline disparities on historically marginalized students.



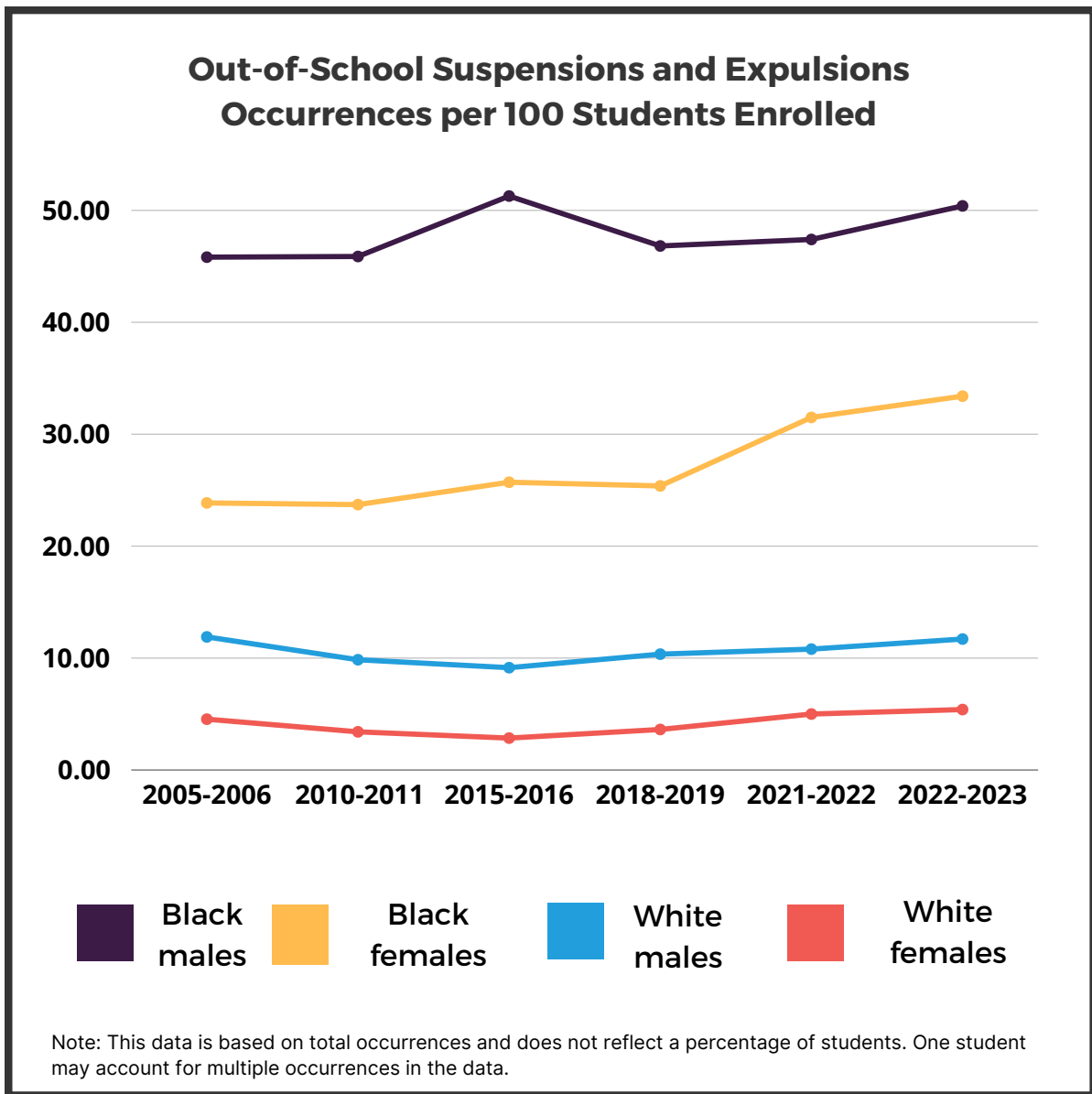
Note: The rate of occurrences per student should not be interpreted as a percentage of students. Students who are suspended multiple times are counted twice in this measure.

Black students are disciplined for “Disobedient/Disruptive Behavior” and other reasons at a higher rate than other groups. Implicit bias and systemic racism are exposed in harsh discipline for behavior that is otherwise excused or handled differently for other groups. Longitudinal data from 2005-2023 reveals stark disparities in the Black-White discipline gap. The gap between Black and White students reached its peak in 2015-2016 and has been climbing again.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

“Things like zero-tolerance policies are often unfairly enforced in school districts and often more heavily enforced towards members of minority groups. Reducing the use of out-of-school discipline is a welcome change to keep students in school where there are safe spaces for learning. I believe that discipline *in schools* is a necessity. Oftentimes out-of-school suspension just rewards unacceptable behavior with time off from school. In a few cases, I do see a problem where students who are actively interrupting instructional time are no longer able to be moved outside of these classes. This could then become an issue in districts that do not have the resources to have in-school placement for these students.” - High-School Student

Disaggregated data by race and gender further emphasizes the pronounced discipline gap. In the 2022-2023 school year, Black males in Ohio were 4.3 times more likely than white males to be suspended or expelled. The disparity is even larger when comparing Black females to White females, with Black females facing six times more out-of-school suspensions than their White peers. Black students encounter a higher risk of suspension or expulsion for subjective behavioral violations, highlighting differential treatment patterns, implicit bias, and the impact of historical judgments.



Positive Alternatives

Because of the disproportionate impact on economically disadvantaged and Black and Brown students, and the subjectivity and risk of introducing implicit bias into discipline practices, schools should not rely on exclusionary discipline for minor misconduct, nonviolent, or disruptive behaviors. Instead, they should implement and embed restorative practice, social emotional learning, and trauma informed practices within their Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework and find innovative ways to offer emotional, community, and academic support. Fostering positive teacher-student relationships and promoting a sense of belonging in the school community can contribute to a more positive and inclusive school.



EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

“Restorative justice as a practice has been around for a while and does work if you have the extra resources and people trained to help facilitate these conversations. They must continue working with those students not just once until a situation is deescalated, but multiple times, to keep reiterating and practicing those strategies.”

- Middle School Teacher

Recommendations

The ripple effects of exclusionary discipline impact the entire school community. Schools and communities must recognize that what historically has been categorized as a disciplinary issue, often reflects a child's unaddressed needs. If we continue to measure how well children surmount barriers rather than address the barriers themselves, our school systems will continue to fall short in creating the supportive, safe, and welcoming environments that all children deserve. With this understanding, lawmakers and school administrators can begin to institute policy and programmatic changes to school discipline policies and instead elevate whole child supports.

To enhance education equity for the long-term benefit of all Ohio children, Ohio must consider the following recommendations:

Fund and expand the SAFE Act and investigate violations

The zero tolerance mandate is an outdated and failed approach that should be eliminated. Alternatively, expanding the SAFE Act provisions to apply to more students would prevent the worst impacts of a zero tolerance policy by protecting children from unnecessary exclusionary discipline. The SAFE Act has been largely successful in reducing out-of-school discipline occurrences for students PK-3rd grade. Ohio lawmakers should expand the number of grade-levels included in this provision to extend the protections to all students, especially all elementary-age students. In addition to its expansion, the SAFE Act must be amended to include necessary funding to adequately invest in school counselors and other social and emotional supports to fully implement the intent of the Act.

To ensure implementation of the SAFE Act, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce officials must continually investigate occurrences that don't adhere to the prohibition on unnecessary exclusionary discipline and hold districts accountable for violating this policy. This process should model restorative practices by inviting administrators to participate in discussions about reasons for continuing to use exclusionary discipline and identifying possible solutions.

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

"We need the funds to hire trained people that can come into the school and pull these students to help them learn these skills and strategies to do restorative justice practices. We need the support in all areas to make the changes at an earlier age to prevent them from entering the prison system. I have been trained on restorative justice multiple times and even facilitated meetings between students and it does work IF it can be done consistently with a facilitator who understands the entire situation, is trauma informed, and can jump right in." -Middle School Teacher

Support educators with carved-out time and resources to support behavior interventions

Educators who are charged with achieving high standards for educational outcomes and managing complex classroom environments must be supported in their efforts to create a positive school climate that does not rely on exclusionary discipline. Ohio's educators are expected to meet extremely high academic outcome standards while also providing behavioral support for students. This balance can feel like an insurmountable task.

In partnership with Baldwin Wallace University, CDF-Ohio published survey data showing that Ohio parents and caregivers, regardless of race, gender, age, education, religion, economic status, area of residence, or political affiliation, overwhelmingly support whole child education approaches, want schools to prioritize equity, and *trust their children's educators to be partners in their children's success*.¹¹ Educators must be empowered with adequate resources, both in terms of time and space, to offer students the support they need to thrive. Restorative practices take time, and providing alternative learning environments outside of a traditional classroom space requires space and highly-trained professionals.

Even with the Fair School Funding Plan, schools do not have adequate funding to hire as many support staff (intervention specialists, behavior specialists, school psychologists, counselors, ESL teachers, social workers, aides, etc.) as are needed to provide effective restorative practices. Policymakers must continue to build upon the Fair School Funding Plan to incorporate dedicated funding for professionals and support services that can enhance positive student behavior in addition to high quality instruction.

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

"When one very disruptive student is gone, my 29 other kids now have a chance to focus on their education. To me, it comes down to class sizes. It is way harder to handle and correct small behaviors, like disruption or inappropriate behavior...when you have 30 students in one classroom."

- Middle School Teacher

Conduct culturally responsive training

Teachers must also be supported in their educational and training pursuits to allow them to learn and adapt. A teacher or school administrator's own implicit bias or not understanding a student's culture may also contribute to the disparities that exist in our school exclusionary discipline rates.¹² Lawmakers should ensure schools have adequate funding to support teachers and school staff to engage in culturally responsive training.

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

"I, personally, do not believe suspension or expulsion is solving any problems. Pushing students out is only creating a pattern where the system continues to fail our children. We know Black and Brown students are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than their peers and I believe one reason for this, beyond the obvious racist systems that are in place for children of color to survive versus thrive, are the curriculums. Students are unable to see themselves reflected in their learning environments. How can educators continue to learn and educate themselves on the injustices that are happening every single day inside and outside of our schools?"

- 5th Grade Teacher

Center community engagement

Parents and caregivers play a key role in developing a positive school climate. Parents can be effective leaders as a part of the school community, creating space for meaningful engagement. Listening sessions and focus groups with school administrators, teachers, parents and caregivers, and students can help everyone understand barriers, identify factors that result in exclusionary school discipline, and participate in decision making around disciplinary practices. Meaningful community engagement between the school and the community will foster strong partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to create a network of student support.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parents involved with the Central Ohio Parent Leadership Training Institute are deeply invested in creating positive school climates at their children's schools. A group hosted a Teacher Appreciation Night at their local school to build meaningful connections between parents and educators. Parent leadership and initiative are critical to creating school environments where students thrive.



Address student needs through investments in community and student supports

1. *Community Learning Center Model.* One way to improve the health of students and their families is by dedicating state funding to expand access to school-based and community-connected health care. While every district's needs are unique, there are many promising models for creating community partnerships in school-based and community health. Full implementation of the community learning center model requires additional investments for specialized staffing and agencies to provide services.

2. *Expand School Medicaid* to enable schools to draw down more federal funding to school health services to expand their services to reach more students and build more capacity given workforce shortages in school support staff. This can be done through ODM filing a State Plan Amendment (SPA) to permit Medicaid to cover eligible services to all Medicaid-enrolled students.

3. *Free School Meals for All.* We also recommend the state pass legislation that allows all of Ohio's schools to provide healthy school meals at no cost to all Ohio students, ensuring that no student goes hungry and can therefore, become a more positive engaged learner in the classroom.

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

"We've already been told our school district is over budget and we do not have the funds for additional support. For example, our school has over 500 students and one counselor. Our counselor who is constantly doing administrative responsibilities and does not have time to support all the students who need the support. In the past years, social emotional and mental health needs are increasing in a way I've never seen before. Our children need extra care in school in order to thrive. Funding is necessary in order for this theory to work. Schools need many more counselors!"
-5th Grade Teacher

Embed restorative practices within a PBIS Framework

All Ohio public schools are required to adopt policies and procedures regarding PBIS. The goal of PBIS is to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to create and maintain positive school environments so all students can thrive both academically and socially. Restorative practices, which offer an alternative to unnecessarily punitive discipline policies and foster more equitable solutions, should be embedded into a school's pre-existing PBIS framework. Additional funding should be provided to schools to implement restorative practices into their PBIS framework.

With a restorative-practice emphasis, school discipline shifts away from exclusionary practices to those involving repair of harm inflicted and the relationships damaged. The goal is to develop climates that promote understanding and inclusion. Emphasis is placed on restoration of personal relationships rather than on punishment which can damage, and sometimes deteriorate relationships. Policymakers must understand the value of these time-intensive practices and ensure that districts have sufficient resources to embed time for them into the staff master schedule. To embed restorative practices in the PBIS framework, school must (1) have a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)¹³ framework in place; (2) have key staff buy-in; (3) assess their capacity to take on a culture shifting set of practices including need, resources, and commitment; (4) Identify interested pioneers/community partners; (5) add student, staff, and parent voice to discipline decisions; and; (6) become more whole-learner focused.¹⁴

Implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programs

Evidence-based social emotional learning helps students develop critical life skills, achieve their goals, and be informed, active citizens. Social emotional skill sets – such as self-awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making – help children and young people cope with stress, uncertainty, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and the complex realities that have complicated their lives. As part of this recommendation, schools must be funded to provide opportunities for ongoing professional development for teachers and staff on trauma-informed practices, cultural competency, and understanding the impact of social determinants on student behavior.

END NOTES

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