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RESEARCH

School-Based Youth Courts

Student Perceptions of School Climate, Safety, and
Disciplinary Measures

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Executive Summary

Youth courts, also called teen courts or student courts, handle cases involving young people referred by schools, parents, law enforcement, and other criminal justice agencies. Schools are increasingly adopting youth courts to use in place of detention and suspension, diverting students who commit school infractions from standard punishment, using positive peer pressure to correct negative behavior, and repairing the harm done through misbehavior, and teaching students about the justice process. Youth courts are typically peer-driven: teens serve as the judge, jury, bailiff, and advocates, though some models include an adult as the judge. Teens sent to justice-based youth courts are often first time misdemeanor offenders. In both juvenile justice and school settings, it is typical for those accused of misbehavior to admit guilt prior to the youth court referral so that the process does not involve a judgment of guilt or innocence. The role of the youth court then becomes determining an appropriate penalty or restitution.

Research Design

In February of 2011, multiple New York City high schools expressed an interest in developing youth courts and requested planning assistance from the Center for Court Innovation. Two high schools¹ implemented their youth courts before the end of the school year and were chosen for a process study. A mixed-method approach was used to collect data:

- Pre-post surveys of students' attitudes about school climate, safety, and discipline (n = 109 for the School A pre-survey and 48 for the post-survey; n = 70 for the School B pre-survey and 45 for the post-survey);
- Disciplinary data provided by the New York City Department of Education; and
- Interviews at the end of the school year with teachers, administrators, and youth court members and respondents.

The data was used to illuminate student attitudes and school climate in the two participating schools and to consider the following research questions:

- 1) Did students feel safer after the youth courts were implemented?
- 2) Did students feel school discipline was fairer after the youth courts were implemented?
- 3) Did students and teachers feel that youth courts was a better alternative to punishment than detention or suspension?
- 4) Did incidents, suspensions, and the proportion of incidents where a suspension would normally be used decrease after the youth courts were implemented?

Results

- Prevalence of Conflicts: In interviews, students, teachers, and administrators expressed that conflicts in their respective schools were currently minimal and that staff respected students and vice versa.

¹ In order to keep their anonymity, the schools involved in the evaluation will be referred to as "School A" and "School B."

- Perceptions of School Disciplinary Practices: Interviewees, for the most part, thought that the use of discipline was fair.
- Support for Youth Court: Students, teachers, and administrators also expressed support for the youth court as a positive alternative to traditional means of discipline.
- Changes in Student Perceptions: Students at both schools who took the survey did not report significantly improved perceptions of safety, school climate, and administrators' use of discipline from the beginning of the school year to the end. The failure to detect an effect may reflect small sample size in the post-implementation survey or the limited period during which the youth courts had been operational when the post-survey was implemented.
- Changes in Incidents and Suspensions: According to the data from the New York Department of Education, the number of incidents went down in both schools. The use of suspensions as discipline increased on a percentage basis. After separating the incidents by level of seriousness (i.e. whether or not a suspension was a possible response), the data revealed that the increase in suspensions may have been the result of an increase in the percentage of more serious incidents. Clear attribution of either trend to the youth court is not possible.

The findings from the evaluation should be interpreted with extreme caution considering that both youth courts had been operating for only three or four months; it may have been too soon to determine an effect on student perceptions; and factors beyond the control of the research team precluded a high response rate to student interviews or the use of a true comparison group. As such, this study should be viewed primarily as a process analysis, whose methods and results may suggest directions for future research on the school-based youth court model.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Youth courts, also called teen courts or student courts, were established in the 1970s as an alternative to traditional court for teenagers in trouble with the police for minor offenses such as theft, vandalism, alcohol, and disorderly conduct, but it was not until the 1990s that they began to proliferate (Butts et al. 2002; Harrison et al. 2001; Stickle et al. 2008). Many youth courts operate as a diversion from the justice system. For example, Reich (2013) found that the Staten Island Youth Court has served as a diversion program for 16- and 17-year-olds charged with shoplifting where more cases were disposed with an Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissals (ACDs) after the creation of the youth court and there was less use of sealed Youthful Offender findings and sealed non-criminal convictions. (YO findings, although they do not yield a criminal record in themselves, increase exposure to a permanent criminal conviction on any future case). Schools are increasingly adopting youth courts to use in place of detention and suspension with the goals of diverting students who commit school disciplinary infractions, helping the youth make better decisions going forward, and teaching students about the justice process (Butts et al. 2002; Harrison et al. 2001; Pearson and Jurich 2005; Stickle et al. 2008). Approximately 36 percent of youth courts are currently based in schools (National Youth Court Center 2013).

Youth courts are typically peer-driven: teens serve as the judge, jury, bailiff, and advocates, though some models include an adult as the judge. Teens sent to community-based youth courts are often first-time misdemeanor offenders. In both community and school settings, it is typical for those accused of misbehavior to accept responsibility prior to being sent to the youth court so that the hearing process does not involve a finding of guilt or innocence by their peers (Weisz, Lott, and Thai 2002). The role of the youth court then becomes determining an appropriate response or sanction. Respondents are sometimes selected to be jury members once their sanction is completed.

Youth courts are based on the theoretical concept known as *restorative justice*, where offenders are held accountable for their actions, and relationships between offenders and victims are restored through the sanctions given by the jury – for example, through community service or letters of apology (Godwin 2001; Stickle et al. 2008). In addition, participation in the youth court is thought to teach youth (both members and offenders) about the legal process and the impact of unlawful behavior as well as to encourage civic engagement (Harrison et al. 2001, Pearson and Jurich, 2005). Youth court participation is also believed to improve personal skills in areas such as public speaking, leadership, collaborating with peers and faculty, and making decisions (Hirschinger-Blank et al. 2009).

Evaluations of youth courts have been criticized for having weak research designs (e.g., no comparison group), small samples, and different definitions of recidivism (Butts and Buck 2000; Norris et al. 2011; Stickle et al. 2008; Wilson et al. 2009). Within those studies that did have comparison groups, the effect of youth courts on youth pro-social attitudes did not significantly change after youth court hearings (Butts et al. 2002), and youth had fewer beliefs in conventional rules (Stickle et al. 2008). Weisz, Lott, and Thai (2002) examined defendant attitudes about their experience, and results showed that youth felt they were treated with respect, the process was fair, and they were able tell their side of the story; however, their respect for institutional authority did

not increase. Greene and Weber (2008) also found that jurors who were formerly defendants believed they were treated fairly during their case and wanted to treat the defendant whose case they were on the same. Regarding recidivism, those who participated in youth courts were found to have higher self-reports of delinquency (Stickle et al. 2008) and official delinquency (Povitsky 2005). Butts et al. (2002) found from reviewing other extant research that youth courts reduced recidivism in some sites and either had no effect or increased recidivism (not significantly) in others. Patrick and Marsh (2005) also did not find a significant change in recidivism among youth court participants compared to a control group. More recently, Schwalbe et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of youth diversion programs and found that youth courts consistently did not decrease recidivism.

These previous studies exclusively concern youth courts in community settings. Only one study has evaluated a school-based youth court, and it was a pilot assessment that examined the benefits of participation for volunteers serving as jurors, and respondents and their parents (Hirschinger-Blank et al. 2009). Focus groups and surveys revealed many positive outcomes from the youth court such as the volunteers showed interest in helping respondents stay out of trouble; respondents and their parents felt that they were treated fairly by the youth court and believed that the youth court's disposition was a more positive alternative to what the principal's punishment might have been. Similar to other youth court research, the aforementioned study was limited by a small sample size (16 volunteers, 14 respondents, and 7 parents) and no comparison group. No other evaluations of school-based youth courts have been conducted to date. Therefore, the purpose of this evaluation was to improve knowledge regarding school-based youth courts by considering whether courts in two New York City high schools may have improved the school climate, reduced the use of suspension and detentions, and been perceived as a positive alternative to traditional discipline.

Chapter 2. Sample and Methodology

Two NYC public high schools participated in this study. These schools were selected because they wanted to start a youth court and had applied for technical assistance from the Center for Court Innovation. School A is a small high school located in the Bronx that shares its building with other schools. Its youth court began hearing cases in February of 2012. School B is located between the neighborhoods of Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick in Brooklyn and includes students from all five New York City boroughs. Its youth court began hearing cases in January of 2012. The original plan was to evaluate the youth courts after they had been operational for nearly a full school year and to include post-implementation surveys of schools with and without youth courts. However, both schools were slow to start their youth courts and neither court heard more than 25 cases before the end of the school year. In addition, programmatic staff was ultimately unable to secure the cooperation, with the research, of planned “comparison” schools. Hence, attribution of any observed effects (or null effects) to the youth court should be interpreted with extreme caution.

A mixed method evaluation was designed to illuminate student attitudes and school climate in the two participating schools and to consider the following research questions:

- 1) Did students feel safer after the youth courts were implemented?
- 2) Did students feel that the school discipline was fairer after the youth courts were implemented?
- 3) Did students and teachers feel that the youth court was a better alternative to punishment than detention or suspension
- 4) Did the number of incidents, suspensions, and the proportion of incidents where a suspension would normally be used decrease after the youth courts were implemented?

The evaluation involved three components. The first was pre-post surveys of students at both schools.² The survey contained questions about the school climate, perceptions of school safety, delinquency in the school, self-reported delinquency, school discipline, and the youth court (in the post survey only).³ Students were given surveys at the beginning and end of the 2011-2012 school year, which was before and after the implementation of the school youth court, respectively. A total of 157 surveys were administered to students at School A—109 pre-implementation and 48 post-implementation. One hundred seventeen surveys were administered to students at School B—70 pre-implementation and 47 post-implementation. Cross-tabulations were calculated to make comparisons between student opinions in the pre-implementation and post-implementation periods

² Students from two other schools that did not hear any youth court cases (despite initially planning to open a youth court) were intended to be used as a comparison group, but school officials declined to participate in the end-of-year survey.

³ The survey is not included in this report due to its length. However, it is available upon request. Contact the researcher if you would like a copy of the survey.

for both schools. Student demographic data was also compared between the students who were sampled in the pre- and post-implementation periods. As shown in Table 2.1,⁴ the samples were broadly comparable in each period, except that for unknown reasons, female students in School B appeared to have been over-sampled in the pre-implementation period (70%) relative to post-implementation (42%).

Table 2.1. Survey Participant Demographics

	School A		School B	
	Pre-YC	Post-YC	Pre-YC	Post-YC
	(n=109)	(n=48)	(n=70)	(n=45)
Female	34%	40%	70%	42%
Race				
Black/African American	19%	19%	59%	45%
Hispanic/Latino	61%	63%	19%	28%
White/Caucasian	2%	0%	3%	11%
Asian	5%	2%	0%	2%
Other	13%	16%	19%	14%
Grade				
9th	31%	40%	56%	69%
10th	31%	60%	19%	16%
11th	22%	0%	23%	7%
12th	16%	0%	3%	2%

The second component of the evaluation was to analyze disciplinary data provided by the New York Department of Education. Specifically, the data includes numbers of all incidents and suspensions at School B and School A for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. A descriptive analysis was used to determine whether the number of disciplinary incidents and suspensions decreased as well as whether the number of suspensions decreased in proportion to the number of incidents after the implementation of the youth courts.

The final component was to conduct interviews at the end of the school year with teachers, administrators, and youth court members and respondents. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a more in-depth understanding of the school culture, disciplinary practices, and whether interviewees felt that the youth court was a good alternative to traditional means of punishment. Two administrators and two teachers were interviewed at School A, as well as three youth court members and one respondent. At School B, four teachers and four youth court members were interviewed.

The following section presents the results of the evaluation; however, there were multiple challenges that limit their internal validity. The greatest limitation is that that youth courts did not start until January of 2012 at the earliest, leaving only four months, at best, to hear cases. In

⁴ Two percent of respondents at School B fit into an “other” grade category, but were not reported in the table.

addition, there were no comparison schools. Finally, programmatic staff charged with administering surveys were unable to elicit a high response rate, particularly with the post-implementation surveys. Consequently, it was not statistically feasible to implement paired samples t-tests, analyzing changes among the exact same students before and after implementation. Instead, for statistical purposes, the pre and post samples had to be treated as independent (although, of course, there was some overlap).

Given these problems in implementing both the youth courts and the research, it is impossible to convincingly attribute any change (or lack of change) seen in student perceptions and disciplinary policies to the youth courts. Much of the survey data is best viewed as suggestive. However, the interviews provide valuable insight into the schools' climates and how students and teachers perceive the youth court.

Chapter 3. Results

This chapter reports study findings related to all research questions.

1. Did students feel safer after the youth court was implemented?

Table 3.1 describes student perceptions of school safety from the student surveys. At School A, most students (77 percent) either strongly agreed or agreed that they were safe in the hallways, bathroom, and lockers rooms at the beginning of the school year. This percentage changed marginally (82 percent) at the end of the school year. In addition, the majority of students (70 percent) felt safe on school property outside the building at the beginning of the school year and the percentage increased to 80 percent at the end of the year.

At School B, 87 percent of students felt safe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms and 75 percent felt safe on school property outside the building at the beginning of the school year, but those percentages decreased to 70 percent and 54 percent, respectively, at the end of the school year (Table 3.1). Even so, the percentages after the implementation of the youth court still reflect that a majority of students feel safe inside and outside school property. At both schools, the observed quantitative changes in survey responses were not statistically significant and robust.

During the interviews at School A, teachers and administrators expressed that they respect students, and the student interviewees agreed. Interview participants stated that students were always welcome to discuss any problems they may have in or outside of school. During the interviews at School A, teachers, administrators, and students expressed that while there are conflicts, they did not occur more than at other schools. When students talk back to or curse teachers, the administrators thought that “99 percent of the time” the incident was easily solved usually by teachers on their own. The assistant principals also reported that there were fights between students, often because of something that was said on Facebook the day prior or as a result of students bullying one another. Respondents reported that fighting incidents rarely occurred in the classroom and happen mostly in the lunchroom or hallways when the students have idle time. One teacher who had been at the school for several years noted that the school used to have many fights but that changed with a new principal. All of the teacher and administrator interviewees reported feeling safe in the school, citing the metal detectors, clear systems of how to respond to incidents, more avenues of support, and outside resources.

Students also reported feeling safe at school. However, students were not supportive of the metal detectors. The interviewees from School A did not say that the school climate was better specifically because of the youth court.

The interviewees (both teachers and students) provided a slightly different picture of the school climate at School B, acknowledging that the school did not have good reputation for safety, but conveying that the climate had recently changed for the better. The interviewees noted that school disciplinary policies had become more structured, although some difference of opinion persisted among the teachers interviewed regarding the actual extent to which the school was currently on

the right path, noting that the administrative staff showed favoritism towards some students.

Students at School B spoke highly of their teachers. Students reported that their teachers cared a lot, gave individualized attention, and set high academic standards. However, some of the interviewees were hesitant to recommend the school to other students, because they said that there were students who do not respect teacher, that teachers and administration often disagreed, and that the school was disorganized. Also, the student interviewees believed that some members of the administration showed favoritism towards certain students. For example, one student interviewee reported having been suspended for almost getting into a fight while the other girl involved in the argument was not suspended. One of the newer teachers was positive about the implementation of school discipline, but other teachers disagreed with the way administrators handled the school at times.

Regarding school safety, the students reported that there were few fights at the school and that the school safety agents broke up those fights quickly. According to the student interviewees, the presence of security guards and the assistant principal made them feel safe and comfortable reporting fights to teachers and administration. The teachers also felt that the school was generally safe, despite having some equipment and personal items stolen. Like the interviewees from School A, those from School B did not specifically link the improvement in the school's climate to the youth court.

2. Did students feel that school discipline was fairer after the youth court implemented?

At the beginning of the school year, 78 percent of survey respondents at School A thought school rules were fair; 79 percent felt the punishment for breaking school rules was the same no matter who you are; 61 percent believed that the school rules were strictly enforced; and 75 percent knew what kind of punishment would follow if a rule was broken. These percentages slightly decreased (but not significantly) to 65 percent, 72 percent, 54 percent, and 66 percent respectively by the end of the school year (Table 3.1).

At School A, 77 percent of respondents felt that discipline at their school was fair; at the end of the school year, that percentage dropped (non-significantly) to 68 percent. Respondents felt that school rules made the school safer and a better learning environment (71 percent and 72 percent, respectively, at the beginning of the school year), and felt somewhat more so (but, again, not by a statistically significant margin) at the end of the year (78 percent for both questions). The percentage of students who felt that the school rules were too strict increased from 42 percent to 51 percent (Table 3.1).

At School B, the percentage of respondents who felt that school rules were fair at the end of the school year was statistically unchanged (59 percent and 60 percent respectively). The percentage of respondents who felt that the punishment for breaking school rules is "the same no matter who you" are decreased marginally from 74 percent to 67 percent; the percentage of respondents who believed that school rules were strictly enforced decreased from 81 percent to 57 percent, and the percentage of respondents who knew what kind of punishment will follow if a rule was broken dropped from 80 percent to 63 percent (Table 3.1).

Fewer respondents at School B felt that discipline at their school was fair (from 70 percent to 57 percent), that school rules made the school safer (from 85 percent to 65 percent), and that school rules created a better learning environment (from 79 percent to 57 percent) at the end of the school year. The percentage also dropped for respondents thinking that school rules were too strict (from 51 percent to 42 percent) (Table 3.1).

None of the aforementioned changes were statistically significant or robust enough to draw any conclusions, particularly given the possibility of inherent differences between the pre- and post-implementation samples.

Most of the teachers, assistant principals, and student interviewees at School A believed that the rules were fair and that they made sense. However, several of the teachers and administration interviewees felt that discipline was not equally enforced. One of the assistant principals explained that they were still trying to determine which cases were better suited for youth court or suspension. Another issue according to one of the administrators, was that the school has a safety officer on site. When there was a fight, the officer had to write a summons in addition to the school's punishment; therefore, the students were effectively punished twice.

Despite surveys showing a decrease in overall perceptions of fairness in discipline, the students at School B who were interviewed believed discipline in their school to be fairer because of the youth court. They said that prior to the youth court, students were suspended without being allowed to explain what happened from their perspective; now, they can tell their side, and suspensions were less likely to be used as punishment.

2. Did students and teachers feel that the youth court was a better alternative to punishment than being sent to detention or suspended?⁵

All teachers and administration interviewees at School A had heard of the youth court and thought it was a good thing. They liked that students could get involved in the disciplinary process and have a way to get back into good standing. They said it helped safety and discipline issues in school in general. The youth court members who were interviewed liked being a part of the court and confirmed that the youth court was well known in school. Some of the interviewed teachers and administrators had attended a session and were impressed. Although a few did not believe it was better than traditional means of punishment, they said the youth court was useful in that it provided administrators with another option. One of the students was skeptical of its long-term benefits. He was not sure if youth court would keep students out of trouble for a long time, but believed that it would help in the short-term. No teachers who were interviewed had personally been involved, but they knew that other teachers who had been directly involved felt satisfied with how the case was handled and believed that the youth court's response was appropriate.

⁵ The post survey did include questions regarding the respondents' thoughts about the youth court; however, more reported that they had been sent to the youth court than there were cases that year, calling into question the accuracy of those questions. Therefore, the responses are not included in this section.

Table 3.1. School Safety, Rules, and Discipline Survey Responses

	School A		School B	
	Percent Agree Pre-YC	Percent Agree Post-YC	Percent Agree Pre-YC	Percent Agree Post-YC
	(n=109)	(n=48)	(n=70)	(n=47)
I am safe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms at school.	77%	82%	87%	70%
I am safe on school property outside my school building.	70%	80%	75%	54%
The school rules are fair.	78%	65%	59%	60%
The punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are.	79%	72%	74%	67%
The school rules are strictly enforced.	61%	54%	81%	57%
If a school rule is broken, students know what kind of punishment will follow.	75%	66%	80%	63%
Discipline in my school is fair.	77%	68%	70%	57%
The school rules make the school safer.	71%	78%	85%	65%
The school rules make it a better learning environment.	72%	78%	79%	57%
The school rules are too strict.	42%	51%	51%	42%

¹YC=Youth Court

²These percentages combine "agree" and "strongly agree" responses.

The assistant principal said that the success rate of students participating in the youth court was high, but there were still some challenges, such as the selection process (which cases do and do not go to youth court); scheduling (holding court on a day the student in trouble is available); and sanctions (making sure they are neither too lenient nor too onerous). The one interviewee who was sent to the youth court was pleased with his experience, with the exception of receiving punishment from the school administration in addition to the court members' response.⁶ The other student involved in the argument did not receive any punishment, which the first student thought was unfair. The first student didn't know why he was the only one sent to youth court. He said that he thought that other people would be less likely to get into trouble after going through the youth court.

⁶ The youth court model specifies that there should not be additional punishment from school administration. The purpose of the youth court is to impose an alternative sanction to traditional discipline and not serve as additional punishment. This case was an instance of improper implementation of the youth court model.

All of the teachers interviewed at School B had heard of the youth court, but some were more familiar with it than others. Although they generally saw it as a positive influence, some expressed doubt that it was a better means of addressing problem behavior among students. Among students, youth court was perceived as a good thing and better than other methods of discipline. They believed it was rehabilitative, yet it still let the student know the consequences of their actions. Overall, they thought that youth court provided a fair process and the sanctions helped the students. They also stated that it repaired the relationship between a student and his or her teacher, and typically ended with the student understanding the teacher's perspective better. Students on the youth court said that the visibility from wearing a t-shirt made other students want to be on youth court or go there if they were in trouble. According to the student interviewees, one of the assistant principals told members of the youth court that the program had helped reduce fights in school and that students that go through youth court were less likely to recidivate.

3. Did the number of school incidents, suspensions, and the proportion of incidents where a suspension would normally be used decrease after the youth court was implemented?

Although data was collected on disciplinary incidents, because the youth courts experienced delays in implementation, attribution of any changed patterns to the youth court itself is not possible. School A had 275 disciplinary incidents, 89 of which were suspensions (Table 3.2). Incidents that most often resulted in suspension were altercations and/or physically aggressive behavior (34.8 percent), persistent "Level One behavior," which is defined by the New York Department of Education as "uncooperative/noncompliant behavior," (30.3 percent), and horseplay (10.1 percent). The number of incidents decreased to 202 in the following school-year (2011-2012) and 130 resulted in suspensions. Students were most frequently (24.6 percent) suspended for persistent Level One behavior, having an altercation and/or physically aggressive behavior (21.5 percent), and trespassing (15.4 percent) (Table 3.2). Even though the number of incidents decreased after the implementation of the youth court, the percentage of suspensions used for these incidents increased from 32 percent to 64 percent.

School B had 114 incidents in the 2010-2011 school year (Table 3.3). Of those incidents, 66 resulted in suspensions. Students were most often suspended for having an altercation and/or physically aggressive behavior (25.8 percent), leaving the class or school without permission (19.7 percent), and engaging in group violence (16.7 percent). In 2011-2012, there were 39 incidents at School B, and 28 resulted in suspensions. The greatest proportion of suspensions still involved students having an altercation and/or physically aggressive behavior (32.1 percent), followed by engaging in intimidating and bullying behavior, and coercion/threats (7.1 percent) (Table 3.3)

Table 3.2 Incidents and Suspensions at School A

	School Year	
	2010-2011	2011-2012
Number of Incidents	275	202
Number of Suspensions	89	130
Distribution of Incidents Leading to Suspensions		
Altercation and/or Physically Aggressive Behavior	34.8%	21.5%
Persistent Level 1 Behavior	30.3%	24.6%
Horseplay	10.1%	12.3%
Profane, Obscene, Vulgar Language or Gestures	6.7%	5.4%
Insubordination	5.6%	2.3%
Lying to \ Giving False Information	2.2%	0.8%
Misusing Property Belonging to Others	2.2%	3.1%
Possession of Controlled Substances w/o Authorization, Illegal Drugs or Alcohol	2.2%	0.0%
Weapon Possession (Category I)	2.2%	1.5%
Intimidating and Bullying Behavior	1.1%	4.6%
Vandalism / Graffiti	1.1%	2.3%
Weapon Possession (Category II)	1.1%	0.0%
Bringing unauthorized visitors to school	0.0%	1.5%
Coercion/Threats	0.0%	2.3%
Trespassing	0.0%	15.4%
Using Weapon (Category I) to Attempt Injury upon School Personnel, Students, Others	0.0%	0.8%
Using Weapon Other than Category I or II to Inflict Injury upon School Personnel, Students, Others	0.0%	1.5%

The percentage of suspensions used as discipline at School B increased from 57.9 percent in 2010-2011 to 71.8 percent to 2011-2012. With both School A and School B, the percentage change in the use of suspension may be more of a reflection of the types of incidents that are occurring or being reported. The dramatic drop in incidents may leave only those that are more serious, which would explain the increase in suspensions used. To verify this explanation, further analysis of the incidents at School A separated them by level of seriousness. During the 2010-2011 school year, 17 percent of incidents were “Level Three” or higher, which warrants suspension as one of the possible responses to the incident according to the New York City Department of Education. In the following school year, 30 percent of incidents were Level Three or higher. At School B in the 2010-2011 school year, 78 percent of incidents were at Level Three or higher. During 2011-2012, 100 percent of incidents were Level Three or higher. The increases in more serious offenses at both schools suggests that the increase in the use of suspensions may be related to an increase in the number of incidents that qualify for suspension and cannot be attributed to the implementation of the youth court.

Table 3.3. Incidents and Suspensions at School B

	School Year	
	2010-2011	2011-2012
Number of Incidents	114	39
Number of Suspensions	66	28
Distribution of Incidents Lead to Suspension		
Altercation and/or Physically Aggressive Behavior	25.8%	32.1%
Leaving Class or School Premises w/o Permission	19.7%	0.0%
Group Violence	16.7%	3.6%
Intimidating and Bullying Behavior	9.1%	28.6%
Sexually Suggestive (Verbal/Physical)	4.5%	0.0%
Taking Property Without Authorization	4.5%	0.0%
Horseplay	3.0%	0.0%
Insubordination	3.0%	0.0%
Possession of Controlled Substances w/o Authorization, Illegal Drugs or Alcohol	3.0%	3.6%
Using Force Against/Inflicting to/Inflicting Serious Injury to		
SSA or School Personnel	3.0%	3.6%
Profane, Obscene, Vulgar Language or Gestures	1.5%	0.0%
Threaten/Dangerous Behavior/Violence - Gang Related	1.5%	3.6%
Vandalism / Graffiti	1.5%	0.0%
Weapon Possession (Category I)	1.5%	7.1%
Bomb Threat	0.0%	3.6%
Posting/Distributing Literature or Material Containing Threats	0.0%	3.6%
Using Force Against/Inflicting to/Inflicting Serious Injury to		
Students	0.0%	3.6%

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