



School Discipline and Student Outcomes in New York City

Why did we do this study?

Schools and communities have struggled for decades with the most effective ways to address student misbehavior and violence. The 1990s saw the rise of so-called zero-tolerance approaches to school discipline and safety. However, previous research has found the overuse of suspensions and expulsions is connected to arrest and other negative outcomes for young people—what some advocates call the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

Despite these concerns, prior to our study, *School Discipline, Safety, and Climate: A Comprehensive Study in New York City*, this connection had not been conclusively established in New York City, the largest school district in the country. Along with investigating this relationship, we wanted to ask two other questions about connections: first, between a school’s neighborhood (for example, crime or poverty rates) and outcomes at the school and for individual students; and second, between a school’s characteristics (its demographics, overall climate, and suspension rate) and student outcomes.

What did we do in this study?

Researchers at the Center for Court Innovation studied 804 public middle and high schools in New York City, focusing on students who had a disciplinary incident in school (more than

87,000 students) during the 2012 and 2013 school years. We tracked these students over two years, examining the individual, school, and neighborhood factors associated with suspension, arrest, and grade advancement or graduation. We also looked in-depth at five schools with low suspension rates, documenting their practices and lessons to be applied to other schools.

What did we find?

1. **Suspensions lead to poor outcomes for New York City students.** Suspensions were connected to arrests, failing a grade, and further suspensions in future school years.

50%

students in the study had a future disciplinary incident

1 in 5

students had a future juvenile or criminal arrest

2. **Suspensions are unevenly applied.** Black and Hispanic students, male students, students with disabilities, and low-income students were more likely to be suspended than other students, even when we account for past behavior and look only at similar types of incidents (e.g., violence).

Among students with disciplinary incidents, who is more likely to incur a suspension in the future?

Black students are

1.6x

more likely than white students

Black students were twice as likely to receive a more severe “superintendent suspension,” involving an out-of-school period from six days to a year.

Male students are

1.2x

more likely than female students

Students with disabilities are

1.3x

more likely than students with no disabilities

Students living in poverty are

1.2x

more likely than students who are not economically disadvantaged

3. **Fostering a positive school climate and using suspension sparingly go hand-in-hand.** The reliance on suspension stems, in part, from the assumption that school climate can be improved by removing misbehaving students. But our results show that schools with a better overall climate—as rated by students, teachers, and parents—also have lower suspension rates.
4. **Neighborhood disadvantage and crime rates do not appear to play a significant role in school suspension rates or student behavior.** Although more research is needed, our findings suggest that, regardless of the context that surrounds them, well-resourced schools can be a protective space for students. This also implies that factors inside a school are stronger drivers of the use of suspension than the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood.
5. **Positive practices, especially restorative approaches, can greatly improve overall school climate and student outcomes.** Our results suggest implementing restorative practices—along with other positive approaches such as mediation and student leadership—can lead to lower suspension rates, a more supportive school climate, and positive relationships among administrators, teachers, and students.

For More Information

Read the full report:
courtinnovation.org/school-discipline

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