



Improving Data for School Discipline Research

REDUCING EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE TO IMPROVE EQUITY

CONFERENCE FINAL REPORT





INTRODUCTION

School discipline is increasingly a pressing issue for policymakers and educators. This attention has been driven in part by research evidence that demonstrates the negative impacts of the use of exclusionary practices like suspension. Prior research has linked exclusionary discipline to a range of negative outcomes including lower academic achievement (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Hwang, 2018; Lacoé & Steinberg, 2019), a decreased probability of completing high school (Balfanz et al., 2015; Marchbanks et al., 2015), lower rates of civic participation (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015), and a higher likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Furthermore, research has consistently documented inequities in school discipline, finding, for example, that Black students, males, and students with disabilities are at a heightened risk of exclusionary discipline (Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Barrett et al., 2017; Curran, 2019; Skiba et al., 2011; Welch & Payne, 2010).

This body of research evidence has resulted in concrete movement by both the federal government, state governments, and local school districts to reform disciplinary practices. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice issued a joint Dear Colleague letter focused on the reduction of the use of exclusionary discipline and improved equity in discipline across student subgroups. As of 2015, over 22 states and 23 of the largest 100 school districts had implemented various reforms to school discipline practice (Steinberg & Lacoé, 2017). These changes, however, have not been without criticism. There have been concerns that discipline reforms may contribute to decreases in school climate and safety (Blad, 2018; Eden, 2017), which led to the rescinding of the Dear Colleague guidance in 2018. While a body of research evidence has emerged that explores the impacts of some of these discipline reforms (Ritter, 2018), scholars have also pointed to limitations in the extant body of research such as a lack of credibly causal estimates of suspension's effects or the effects of alternative approaches and inconclusive evidence as to the extent to which disparate rates of discipline reflect racial bias and discrimination (Steinberg & Lacoé, 2017).

One potential contributor to these understudied questions is the availability of particular types of school discipline data. While state and school district administrative datasets often have yearly indicators of suspensions, federal datasets and local administrative datasets tend to not include data related to other disciplinary outcomes beyond suspension or expulsion or questions related to the underlying behavior that resulted in the consequence. This is despite the fact that suspensions are part of a disciplinary pipeline that begins with classroom management practices and often follows a tiered system in which other disciplinary interventions are tried before a student arrives in the principal's office. In addition to better measuring the disciplinary pipeline, researchers have also noted that rigorous evidence around many of the alternatives to exclusionary discipline, like positive behavioral interventions or restorative justice, are only beginning to emerge (Horner & Sugai, 2018; Steinberg & Lacoé, 2017). These limitations of current data have arguably hindered the ability for school discipline researchers to probe some of the most pressing questions related to discipline practice; yet, these limitations are not insurmountable and immutable characteristics of data collection.

In the fall of 2021, the Improving Data for School Discipline Research Conference brought together a working group of pre-eminent and emerging school discipline researchers, representatives from state departments of education, and non-profit organization leaders to interactively discuss the next frontier of school discipline research questions and the data needed to answer such questions. Rather than thinking about which questions can be answered with available data, the group was challenged with thinking about what data could and should exist to answer the most important emerging research questions in school discipline. The participants shared access to novel data, developed plans to collect data that do not exist, and discussed obstacles (political, legal, ethical, and otherwise) and resources to enhance school discipline data collection. The results of this gathering are presented in this report and serve as a roadmap for an agenda in school discipline research that can guide the work of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners toward improved outcomes for students and enhanced equity in school discipline.

CONFERENCE DESIGN

Organized as an interdisciplinary and collaborative space, the Improving Data for School Discipline Research Conference convened approximately thirty individuals engaged in school discipline research or practice (see participant list at the end of the report for the full list). Participants ranged from senior scholars to graduate students and included individuals from the fields of education, public policy, criminology, sociology, and psychology among others. Representatives from three different state departments of education along with several non-profit organizations also took part. The result was a diverse set of perspectives on issues of school discipline and approaches to enhancing data to further research in the field.



The design of the conference was purposefully interactive, seeking to yield new insights and collective brainstorming of original ideas that could propel the field beyond current research endeavors. To this end, participants engaged in three “Idea Sessions” in which they collectively developed a vision for an improved school discipline research agenda and the data necessary to support it. The Idea Sessions progressed from discussing the pressing research questions in school discipline research, to the data needed to address these questions, and finally to the opportunities and challenges anticipated in doing so. On the final day of the conference, participants engaged in group discussions of the actionable items necessary to advance federal, state, and novel school discipline data collection.

The sections that follow provide an overview of the conversations and ideas generated through this collective effort. Following the structure of the conference, this report begins by presenting the pressing research questions identified by conference participants. For five of the questions which generated the most consensus among participants, the report then presents participants’ thoughts on data needs and other considerations to advance these research questions followed by a synopsis of the opportunities and challenges in doing so. The report concludes with an overview of the actionable items to improve federal, state, and novel school discipline data collection.

THE PRESSING QUESTIONS IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE RESEARCH

In the first Idea Session, participants collectively developed what are, in their perception, the most pressing questions in school discipline research. Participants were asked to identify the most pressing research questions in school discipline research, doing so with no restrictions on resources, data sources, or other constraints. From the questions that were generated from small group discussion, participants voted on their top five questions. What follows are the pressing questions that emerged from participants' collective engagement, ordered by perceived importance.



VOTES

RESEARCH QUESTION

- 20** • **What are the micro-processes and structures that generate racial disparities in discipline?**
- **How do we measure the underlying mechanisms fueling the school to prison pipeline (i.e. formative and summative)?**
 - Should we use the term “school to prison pipeline”? Is it dismissive of things that happen outside of schools?
- 16** • **What policies successfully promote equity in school discipline?**
 - How do we evaluate these policies in ways that identify their effects independently of other policies/programs?
 - Do policies that promote equity in discipline also result in reductions in the use of punitive discipline?
- **What malleable factors can we effectively intervene with to increase equity in school discipline?**
- 16** • **How can we identify and train school personnel to implement effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline?**
 - How do school resources and political pressures influence this?
- **How are alternatives to suspension (i.e. restorative practices) communicated and implemented by key stakeholders?**
 - What are the alternatives to suspension and how do we evaluate their effectiveness?
- 15** • **What is the purpose of discipline?**
 - How do we make discipline about more than just control?
 - How do we center the concept of learning in discipline?
- 15** • **How do we translate school disciplinary research in ways that meaningfully shape practice?**



- 13** • **What about the role of other axes of oppression? Gender identity? Sexuality? Disability?**
 - How can educational systems be equitable for all students?
- **How does normativity and gender performance affect discipline particularly for LGBTQ+ youth?**
- 12** • **How can we best use SROs?**
 - Is it possible to transform their jobs (i.e. social workers)?
 - How do we clearly define their role?
 - How are they involved in discipline or not?
- 5** • **What is the influence of teacher training, awareness of school policies, and knowledge of student history in shaping disciplinary outcomes?**
- 4** • **Should/can discipline data affect school choice and other outcomes?**
 - How are discipline data used, and what are the unintended consequences?
 - How does this differ between students' individual disciplinary history and school data?
- 2** • **To what extent and how do community and family engagement impact student discipline outcomes?**
 - How does this differ by student SES, race, parental education?
 - What is the theory of action?
- 2** • **What is the least intrusive way to reliably measure school discipline?**

As shown, the pressing questions in school discipline research, as perceived by conference participants, transcended the broad to the specific, from better understanding the philosophical purpose of discipline to evaluating the effectiveness of particular policies and practices such as training programs or the involvement of school resource officers. The questions considered the ways in which school discipline data and research may extend beyond its stated purpose – such as the unintended consequences of measuring disciplinary outcomes to their interaction with other aspects of the educational system including school choice. Following trends in current disciplinary practice, participants noted a need to better understand alternatives to exclusionary discipline and to continue to examine issues of equity. As part of this, several of the pressing questions pointed to the need for more contextualized data on the day-to-day implementation and processes of school discipline practices. While we note that all of the questions identified were considered pressing by participants, a set of five most pressing questions, as decided by participants, were moved forward for focused consideration of data collection. The next section presents the data needed and additional considerations for addressing these five questions, though we note that many of the observations and insights may equally apply to other pressing research questions.

THE DATA NEEDED TO ANSWER THE PRESSING QUESTIONS

In this section, we present the results of discussions of the data needed to address the five questions that participants identified as the most pressing in school discipline research. For each question, we present participants' specific thoughts on the needed data alongside additional considerations.

QUESTION 1: What is the purpose of discipline?

DATA NEEDED:

- Primary data in the form of surveys and focus groups of stakeholders to understand their views on the purpose of discipline.
- “In the moment” data from those involved in disciplinary situations. For example, what does a teacher feel when making the decision to discipline?
- Data on how the purpose of discipline is communicated to teachers during training.
- Analyses that involve collaboration with philosophers and ethicists and incorporate analysis of values alongside empirical data.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- How do we define “discipline”? Is there a single definition?
- The purpose may not be singular – contributing to democratic equality, social mobility, social efficiency, learning, classroom control, etc.
- Views on the purpose of discipline may vary across geographic settings and across student subgroups including race/ethnicity.

SYNOPSIS:

Participants identified a need to explore the purpose of school discipline. As evidenced by their thoughts on the needed data and additional considerations, this need included an ethical consideration of what the purpose ought to be, an empirical consideration of how various stakeholders perceive and communicate the purpose, and an understanding of how the purpose is considered in particular applied situations. The necessary data then included philosophical argumentation, surveys and interviews of stakeholders, and real-time collection of the rationale of particular actors engaged in disciplinary situations.

QUESTION 2:

What are the micro and structural processes at play in school discipline?

DATA NEEDED:

- “In the moment” data from those involved in disciplinary situations. For example, what does a teacher feel when making the decision to discipline?
- Data on programs, processes, and policies, particularly over time.
- Data on school personnel’s training, racial views, etc.
- Observational data of interactions between students and teachers in schools.
- Implicit bias/association test of school personnel.
- Classroom management data from sources like ClassDojo.
- Data on ability of adults to self-regulate and self-identify (with trauma, history, stress, etc.)
- Data on educator discretion.
- Data on classroom management practices.
- Data on historical and community context.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- There is a need for a strong theoretical framework that elucidates the micro-processes of school discipline.
- Attention to the hyper-surveillance of students is critical. Sources like digital behavior trackers may yield fine grained data but come at a cost to students.

SYNOPSIS:

While much attention has been given to the broader state and district policies related to school discipline as well as aggregate measures of serious disciplinary infractions like suspension, relatively less attention has attended to the day-to-day experiences of school discipline. There is a need to explore the classroom disciplinary practices of teachers, the programs and policies at school levels, and personal and contextual contributors to school discipline implementation. Guiding this work with a developed theoretical framework of the implementation of school discipline as well as attention to the unintended consequences of collecting school discipline data is important.

QUESTION 3:

What policies, programs, practices, and interventions successfully promote equity in discipline?

DATA NEEDED:

- Evaluation research assessing particular programs, policies, and practices.
- Data on sustainability of discipline approaches.
- Data on treatment fidelity and implementation (both qualitative and quantitative).
- Data on the impact of non-disciplinary policies, programs, and practices on disciplinary outcomes. For example, how academic interventions impact disciplinary outcomes.
- Data on student perceptions of programs; Increased student voice.
- Data on the conditions necessary for disciplinary reform; Predictors that support readiness for implementation and sustainability.
- More varied outcome measures.
- Data on dissemination of discipline reforms.
- RCTs of innovative discipline reforms.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- A clearer definition of what “equity” in discipline means.
- A need for theoretical work on program models to support generalizability of results.

SYNOPSIS:

Improving equity in school disciplinary outcomes has been a persistent priority of policymakers and educators. While prior work has identified ineffective practices, such as exclusionary discipline, there is relatively less work that evaluates the impact of alternative approaches on equitable disciplinary outcomes. There is a need for data and rigorous evaluation of particular school discipline policies, practices, and programs. Understanding the implementation and context of these initiatives holds promise for identifying effective approaches to addressing inequities in school discipline.

QUESTION 4:

What is the role of other axes of oppression in discipline? (LGBTQ+, Disability, etc.)

DATA NEEDED:

- Student surveys and focus groups focused on adolescent's developing identities.
- Qualitative data on the experiences of individuals with these identities as well as the perspectives of educators serving students.
- Data on the intersectionality of different identities.
- Analyses of policies that may be discriminatory (i.e. sexist dress code policies).
- Data that includes more consistency of reporting of disability type.
- Data that moves beyond federal categories of race/ethnicity.
- Data that originates from students in addition to administrator.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- How can this data be safely collected (i.e. avoiding unintended consequences of measuring or identifying individuals)?

SYNOPSIS:

While equity has been a central theme in school discipline research, prior work generally focuses on a limited number of broad subgroup categories (such as broad indicators of race/ethnicity or a binary conceptualization of gender). There is a need for school discipline research that explores the experiences of additional subgroups, of the heterogeneity in broadly defined subgroups, and the intersectionality of these groups. In particular, better understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ and students with different disabilities is important. However, in doing so, there is a need to be attentive to the potential unintended consequences of such data collection, ensuring that student privacy is protected.

QUESTION 5:

How do we translate school disciplinary research in ways that meaningfully shape practice?

DATA NEEDED:

- Qualitative data that explores the disconnect between research and practice through interviews with practitioners, researchers, community, and other stakeholders.
- Random assignment of different dissemination practices.
- Measures of “systems variables” from implementation science.
- Data on the political climate related to discipline (buy-in of stakeholders, resources available, stakeholder partnerships).
- Data on site capacity and unique contexts to implement discipline alternatives.
- Data on the barriers and needs with regard to school discipline.
- Data on the practice and experience of stakeholders with discipline so that research can match the actual practice and experience on the ground.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- A theory of adult behavioral change could inform approaches to disseminating discipline research.
- There is a need to develop structures that support synthesis and dissemination, such as research practice partnerships (RPPs).

SYNOPSIS:

Similar to many other areas of educational research, school discipline research is too often disconnected from the work of practitioners or fails to be communicated to broader audiences in ways that can alter practice. Data, both qualitative and quantitative that explicitly explores the disconnect between school discipline research and practice coupled with research that specifically examines this issue hold potential to enhance the benefits of existing school discipline research for practice. One way to address this issue and facilitate further data in this space may be through the development and enhancement of research practice partnerships.

Across the five pressing research questions, participants noted the need for new data that can inform our understanding of experiences of subgroups of students, the effectiveness of alternative forms of discipline, the classroom-level disciplinary practices and interactions, as well as our understanding of the purposes of discipline. Across all of these, participants identified a need to improve our understanding of how the science behind school discipline can be connected to practice. The next generation of school discipline data then may require additions to administrative data (such as capturing additional data on alternative forms of discipline or outcomes for more nuanced subgroups) as well as novel primary data (such as classroom interactions and data on perceptions of the purpose of discipline). In the next section, we present participants’ perspectives on the opportunities for developing this new frontier of school discipline data as well as the challenges that may need to be overcome to do so.



OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES IN ADVANCING A NEW AGENDA FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE RESEARCH

After generating pressing research questions and data sources to answer those questions, participants engaged in a broad-ranging conversation on the opportunities and obstacles to this research. We posed the following conversation for the consideration of the attendees to spur conversation:

“What are the practical barriers to and underutilized resources for novel data for school discipline research? What political, fiscal, and implementation challenges need to be considered at the federal, state, and local levels?”

We recorded the major points of the conversation in order to show an awareness of the opportunities and obstacles inherent in this research. We saw this as a list of points that we need to pay close attention to when designing future school discipline research as well as making recommendations for subsequent data collection activities (i.e., the final section of this report). Below, we include a summary of the major points of conversation on the opportunities and obstacles in school discipline research:

OPPORTUNITIES:

- In academia, there is a push for research/practice partnerships. These partnerships, if focused on student discipline, can come with data access as well as greater impact on practice and on students.
- Similarly, researchers can build trust with educational partners by providing support for their needs. This trust can translate into more useful and impactful research.
- There is much more work to be done in partnership with students, families/communities, coaches, etc.
- Encouraging the use of open science data platforms helps to democratize data, making it available to other researchers to answer more questions on school discipline than the original data collectors had capacity for.
- There are myriad documents that have been underutilized in research on school discipline including meeting minutes from school board meetings and training documents. New analytical techniques like natural language processing could help to turn these documents into usable data.

LOGISTICAL OBSTACLES:

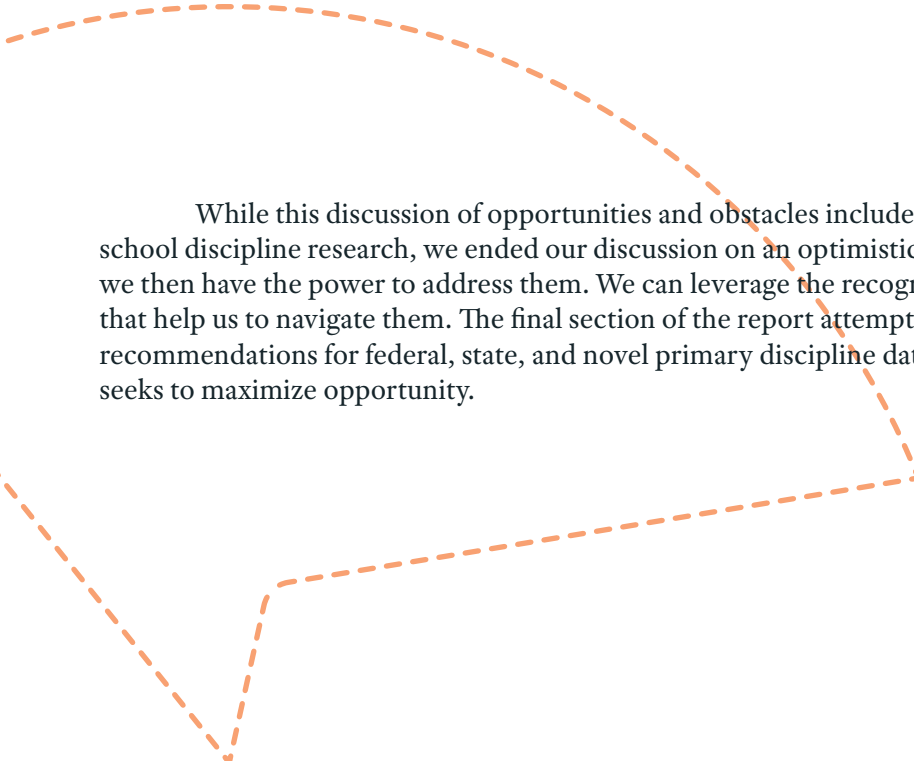
- Funding for research: These are time consuming activities, and researchers need funding to account for their time. Is there potential for states to help with this, to compensate for outside researcher time?
- Federal measures tend to be static, hard to change. There is a disincentive to add measures or change existing measures. The process of changing federal measures is time consuming and expensive.
- Getting better data on school discipline would be time consuming for schools which would need more staff to help manage these data collection activities.
- It is challenging to manage external partnerships especially with multiple existing partnerships that can be overwhelming.
- Researchers seek to help support practice and student outcomes, but how do they maximize this support for schools without taking up too much of their time? In other words, how do researchers balance the potential for research to improve practice with the amount of time practitioners devote to the research?

ANALYTICAL OBSTACLES:

- Participants discussed four key issues: (1) data do not exist, (2) data exist but we cannot access them, (3) measurement challenges with disciplinary processes that we have not yet theorized well, (4) creating action based on our data analyses.
- How do researchers conceive of disciplinary actions and associated data that are summative versus formative?
- There are challenges with analyzing the data, computationally and to avoid having it be too time consuming.
- Researchers often do not have complete understanding about the trustworthiness of their data. It is unclear what constructs or actions are being measured and how.
- Researchers often do not understand what staff and students believe to be disciplinary actions, so they are unclear if the data they observe are truly disciplinary in nature.
- Researchers are often limited in the ability to consider potential consequences of the analyses within limited understanding of how the analyses will be interpreted and used. These policies are affecting real students, and research should be used in positive ways to increase equity and decrease disproportionality. However, researchers do not have control over how research will be used by others.
- Researchers often do not engage in positionality to understand how their experiences and identity influence their analytical choices and interpretation of findings.

POLITICAL OBSTACLES:

- How do researchers navigate the connections between science, policy, and politics?
- Often, people in power either in the local/state/federal government as well as educational leaders do not see school discipline as a problem.
- Researchers often encounter a lack of understanding among policymakers particularly when it relates to issues of critical race theory and equity.
- Educational agencies often are reluctant to share data because they are concerned about violating FERPA.
- Researchers often receive push back in discussions about gender identity and other sensitive, politically charged topics.
- Schools and districts are disincentivized to accurately report student discipline and school safety concerns because of the “persistently dangerous school” designation which would allow students to transfer from schools that receive this label.



While this discussion of opportunities and obstacles included some thorny issues that we encounter regularly in school discipline research, we ended our discussion on an optimistic note. In recognizing and naming these obstacles, we then have the power to address them. We can leverage the recognition of these challenges into concrete actions that help us to navigate them. The final section of the report attempts to do just this, capturing participants’ views on recommendations for federal, state, and novel primary discipline data in ways that are cognizant of these obstacles but seeks to maximize opportunity.



ACTIONABLE ITEMS TO ENHANCE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DATA

FEDERAL DATA

Our federal data discussion yielded recommendations to enhance data quality, public and researcher access, and capacity to analyze salient research questions. In this section, we capture suggestions for how the federal government can improve school discipline data collection.

General Recommendations:

- **Notify interested researchers of when there are requests for comment by federal datasets.** To enhance data quality, researcher access, and capacity to analyze timely research questions, notifying researchers of comment periods for federal data sets could enable researchers to provide thoughtful recommendations.
- **Increase transparency of development and refinement of CRDC items.** The CRDC should provide a similar level of transparency as NCES and other federal data collection organizations to enhance data quality and researcher access.
- **Bring together state agency directors responsible for state level data collection.** State education and federal agencies could collaborate over developing data tools, data collection, oversight, and analysis.
- **Consider federal oversight of data collection for some disciplinary data.** Some state and local education agencies appear reluctant to share quality disciplinary data about exclusionary discipline practices. Thoughtful federal oversight might be helpful to enhance data quality and to improve capacity to analyze research questions.

Recommendations to enhance federal data quality:

- **Re-evaluate race and ethnicity data categories.** The U.S. population has multiple multi-racial groups and data collection should improve to capture this multiplicity of options. Other federal agencies may have exemplary variables to draw from.
- **Evaluate data reported by CRDC in relation to other sources of relevant data.** The CRDC data can vary from what districts collect and report to the CRDC. We seek to understand why there are these differences and what processes are in place to manage data quality. Interoperable standards for data collection and reporting may be helpful.
- **Re-evaluate gender identity and sexuality data categories.** All federal surveys should improve to capture this information. Researchers would like to help the development of these measures.
- **Improve federal technical assistance support for state data systems.** Many states have limited resources and infrastructure for data collection. Federal assistance through dashboards or other means may enhance state level data collection and quality.
- **Use grant scoring guidelines to improve data quality.** Grant scoring guidelines may be used to incentivize enhanced data collection, measures, data definitions, etc.

Recommendations to enhance public and researcher access:

- **Create a shared federal discipline data directory.** A directory of federal disciplinary data might connect silos of data from all sources. It might describe what each dataset covers, access requirements, and overlap between datasets.
- **Re-evaluate restricted use data practices.** With advancing technology, restricted use practices may benefit from a re-evaluation of best practices. Further, some datasets do not provide identifying information but still require restricted use agreements (i.e., SSOCS).
- **Create a directory of researchers who have restricted-use agreements.** A shared directory might increase restricted data use access. Restricted use agreements may also have options for universities or organizations such that all approved researchers at the institution have access to restricted use data.
- **Re-evaluate FERPA administration and requirements.** A re-evaluation and restructuring of FERPA administration may enhance data sharing and access.

Recommendations to enhance capacity to analyze salient research questions:

- **Standardize important components of datasets.** Standardized components (i.e., linkable identifiers) across datasets may allow for interconnectivity and greater consistency across datasets. It would enhance researchers' abilities to answer salient research questions.
- **Standardize expectations for state level data collection.** Standardized guidelines for state level data collection may allow for direct comparison between states.
- **Include more key actors in data collection.** Many school-based adults are meaningfully involved in student discipline including school resource officers, school police, assistant principals, etc. Datasets should survey these actors.
- **Increase frequency of CRDC survey administration to yearly collection.** Yearly data collection would enhance ability to assess and account for important yearly changes that influence student discipline.
- **Focus on equity indicators.** Racial and economic gaps in disciplinary outcomes persist. Federal datasets might include more non-academic and non-discipline measures that may be useful for understanding equity and direct correlates of equity.
- **Rotate question sets on federal surveys.** Discipline and school settings are complex phenomena with many measurable aspects. To maintain current survey length, federal datasets might rotate some items through surveys across decades to capture more meaningful phenomena.

STATE DATA

In this section, we capture suggestions for how state departments of education can improve school discipline data collection as well as how states can support data collection by school districts and researchers.

- **State department of education and researcher partnerships.** Establishing formal partnerships between researchers and state department of education data teams can allow researchers to provide input that helps ensure state data are optimized for research. Additionally, such partnerships can provide additional expertise and capacity for state DOE research priorities by leveraging external researchers to conduct the research.
- **Opportunities for learning from other states.** State personnel responsible for compiling and analyzing school discipline data have limited opportunities to connect and learn from each other. Establishing a national network of state department of education personnel working with school discipline data could support the dissemination of innovative practices and data.

- **Standardize discipline data collection across districts.** Data quality issues often arise when districts do not use consistent codes for discipline, and these differences can inhibit state-wide analyses or comparisons across districts. State DOEs are in a position to establish clear definitions of infractions and punishments, maintain a datasytem tracking this information, and provide the training to districts to enhance the reliability of discipline data.
- **Develop and maintain a state-wide discipline data system.** A state-wide system could facilitate consistent reporting and could include more detailed information on school discipline, such as details on the infraction or school personnel administering discipline.
- **Track use of alternatives to exclusionary discipline.** Many school districts are prioritizing the use of restorative practices and other alternatives to exclusionary discipline, yet, we have limited data on the use of these alternatives. States might add reporting of these alternative disciplinary practices to their data collection.
- **Integrate data across state administrative sources.** School discipline happens within an educational and broader social context. State departments of education have an opportunity to merge school discipline data with broader educational data and other state administrative data (i.e. social services, criminal justice, health, housing, etc.) to create robust data systems that allow for examination of the context and broader effects of school discipline.
- **Compile artifacts of school disciplinary practices.** Training materials, codes of conduct, and other artifacts from school disciplinary practices could be systematically collected by states to provide new forms of data. Emerging analytical tools including natural language processing, provide innovative ways to analyze these sources of data.
- **Create an archive of school discipline laws, policies, and other materials.** Longitudinal analyses of the impact of state laws and guidance on school discipline rely on accurate identification of significant policy changes. The development of a complete historical record of relevant policy changes, guidance, and training materials would facilitate analysis of the effectiveness of state laws and initiatives.
- **Enhance student voice in discipline data.** Behind the school discipline statistics are students who are experiencing discipline firsthand. States can provide students voice through school climate surveys, focus groups, and other mechanisms for ensuring students' lived experiences are represented.
- **Ensure data is available to stakeholders in a user-friendly format.** Many states report school discipline data in spreadsheets that are hard for the typical community stakeholder to draw insights from. States may create school discipline data dashboards that facilitate easy access to school discipline data.

NOVEL DATA

In this section, we capture suggestions for new primary data collection by researchers as well as how such novel data may be situated in district and state data collection.

- **Consortium of districts.** A set of school districts might agree on a similar discipline tracking system that could allow analysis of consistent forms of reporting across a variety of contexts.
- **Schoolwide information systems data.** Many infractions are unable to be coded in SWIS, but improving the system could provide for accountability and insight into the drivers of racial disparities.
- **Alternative schools.** Very little is known about the experiences in and impacts of alternative schools. Both qualitative and quantitative data would be valuable here.
- **Student voice and participatory action research.** Hearing the perspectives of students regarding school discipline would add value to the field and allow for actionable changes in context. Photovoice may be a particularly valuable strategy for carrying this out.

- **In-the-moment data.** Fine-grained data on what happens leading up to, during, and immediately after behavioral infractions would help unpack processes that influence school responses to student behavior. This could also include data on what happens when students return from being suspended.
- **Alternatives to punitive discipline.** Although we know there are many alternatives to punitive discipline, we know little about what options are being used, how they are used, and the contextual factors that shape their use. We also know little about their impacts. Collecting data on alternatives to exclusionary discipline therefore is needed.
- **New analytic techniques for existing data.** Schools collect a lot of data that isn't really treated as data – but it could be. Advances in data analysis (e.g., machine learning, natural language processing) allow for the analysis of data that might otherwise be too complex. Potential data sources include Behavior Improvement Plans and Codes of Conduct.
- **Exemplar districts.** There would be value in case studies of school districts where school discipline is working well.
- **In-school suspension.** We currently know little about what happens during in-school suspension. Observational and survey data of ISS participants could inform our understanding of the implementation of ISS.
- **Details on restorative practices.** How are schools providing resources and training for restorative practices? What are the training materials being used? Could we standardize fidelity measures on restorative practices?
- **Standardized data on threat assessments.** Having standardized data – including student outcomes following the threat assessments – could help us better understand equity in threat assessment.
- **Sensemaking around disciplinary responses to behavior.** It would be useful to understand the mental process of the individuals who connect student behavior to a disciplinary response. Why do they choose the response that they do?
- **Compare teacher & administrator perspectives on discipline.** Do teacher and administrator views on discipline align with each other? What are the consequences if they do or do not?
- **Classroom videos as data.** Video recordings of classrooms could be a novel source of data. Videos have become increasingly used in fields such as learning sciences and policing.



SUMMARY

Maintaining a safe, supportive, and orderly school environment that facilitates learning and social development is an important goal for schools. How to do so effectively in ways that avoid unintended consequences and are equitable for subgroups of students, however, remains contentious. Research has an important role to play to inform school discipline policy and practice. The Improving Data for School Discipline Conference brought together national experts, policymakers, and leaders in the non-profit sector to chart a path for improved data to support school discipline research.

The gathering yielded specific insights that can serve as a foundation for a forward-looking school discipline research agenda. Participants identified pressing research questions including those that can help shed light on the experiences of subgroups of students, the outcomes associated with alternatives to exclusionary discipline, and the classroom-level implementation of discipline. Additionally, there was an identified need to explore and better define the purposes of school discipline and how research can be effectively translated to practice. These questions expand existing lines of research in the field but also push the field to explore the underlying purposes of discipline, the classroom-level implementation of discipline, and the nuances of student experiences.

To achieve answers to these research questions, conference participants identified clear needs for improved school discipline data. In particular, there is a need for improved administrative data that allows for consistent comparisons across settings, for data that documents practices beyond exclusionary discipline such as restorative justice, and for more robust classroom-level data on disciplinary practices. There is also a need to expand the collection of novel data including qualitative data that centers students' voices, data in the form of artifacts such as school codes of conduct and district/state training materials, as well data on the mindsets of students and school personnel involved in particular incidents.

We recognize there are obstacles to the development of these new frontiers of data and the answering of the pressing questions in the field. This report outlines political, bureaucratic, and logistical challenges which those working on school discipline research will have to navigate. However, among these obstacles, we recognize many opportunities, and the suggestions for federal, state, and novel discipline data provide actionable steps that can move the field forward and achieve the vision for improved school discipline data generated by conference participants.

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