

Ban the Discipline Box? How University Applications that Assess Prior School Discipline Experiences Impact College Acceptance of Youth Disciplined in High School

Research demonstrates the negative and inequitable consequences of exclusionary school discipline, such as suspensions, on student outcomes. While prior work shows that students who are suspended are less likely to attend college, the mechanisms behind this phenomenon are less understood. A recent report suggests that about 75% of post-secondary institutions collect information on prior disciplinary infractions during the college application process and that most use this for admissions decisions. This has led advocates to push for “banning the discipline box” on college applications. This study will leverage nationally representative data along with primary data collected on the historical use of such discipline boxes to assess its impact on disciplined students’ likelihood to apply, be accepted at, and receive financial aid at institutions of higher education. Using a student and post-secondary institution fixed-effects approach, the study will address a number of the sources of selection bias that have characterized prior work while providing the first empirical evidence on the effects of the college admissions discipline box. Doing so will both expand the research base on the long-term impacts of high school discipline while also providing actionable information that may inform post-secondary institution’s use of discipline boxes on applications.