

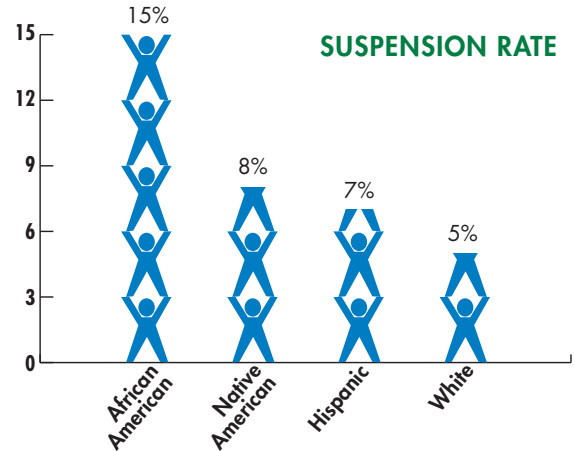
NEPC DISCIPLINE RESOURCE SHEET

# School Discipline What the Research Tells Us: Myths and Facts

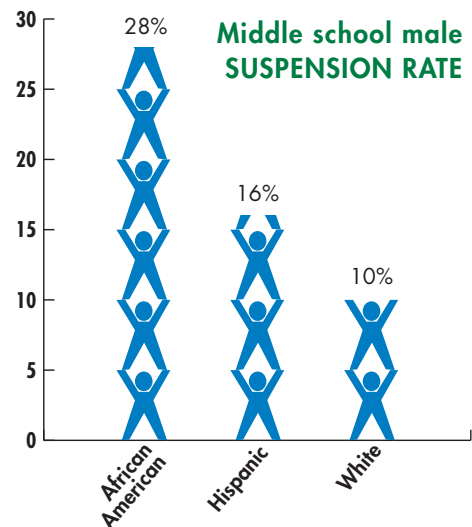
*This is a summary of the report Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice, written by Daniel J. Losen, published by the National Education Policy Center and funded by the Ford Foundation and the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.*

*The complete report, along with suggested statutory changes to implement the report's recommendations, will be available as of October 5, 2011, at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/discipline-policies>.*

- Each year, more than 3.25 million K–12 students are suspended at least once.
- African American students are suspended **THREE TIMES** as often as White students – 15 percent versus 5 percent. Hispanic students (7 percent) and Native American students (8 percent) are also suspended at higher rates than White students.



- Nationally, 28 percent of African American male middle school students and 16 percent of Hispanic male middle school students are suspended each year, compared to 10 percent of White male students.



**MYTH: Suspending disruptive students is necessary to make sure well-behaved students can learn.**

**FACT:** There is no evidence that frequently suspending disruptive students improves learning. In fact, schools with high suspension rates tend to have lower academic achievement, even after controlling for demographics. Many schools are now using suspension so often (primarily for minor infractions) that more than a third of the student body is suspended every year! Research also indicates that suspension is related to an increased risk for dropping out. Students who are suspended miss important instructional time. Students with learning disabilities and students struggling academically are also disproportionately suspended.

**MYTH: Teachers need to suspend students to maintain order and safety.**

**FACT:** Suspension is sometimes a necessary measure of last resort. However, teachers and leaders trained in child and adolescent development and classroom management can use a variety of methods to improve student behavior. Moreover, strategies such as system-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), have proven to be effective in reducing disciplinary removal while raising achievement. PBIS relies on careful data monitoring, shifts school culture and policies to better support positive behavior, and provides a tiered system of supports and interventions for students with challenging behaviors.

**MYTH: Rising suspension rates are a necessary response to increasing school violence.**

**FACT:** Most suspensions are not responses to serious violence. Most states mandate expulsion (not suspension) for weapons, violence, and drug possession/use. Rising suspension rates reflect an increase in school removal for other, lesser infractions. Compared to 102,000 expulsions in 2006-2007 (the most recent year of available data), more than 3.25 million students were suspended at least once, mostly for nonviolent infractions such as truancy, dress-code violations, inappropriate language, and classroom disruptions. Advocates representing students in expulsion cases have even found that some expulsions are for minor, nonviolent infractions, such as repeated instances of talking back or not following a dress code.

**MYTH: Students of color are suspended at higher rates because they misbehave more often.**

**FACT:** Researchers have found no evidence that students of color engage in more misbehavior than White students. Research does document that the largest disparities in discipline of White and African American students are for infractions that involve judgment calls by adults – talking back or disrespect, for instance. For example, an analysis of North Carolina discipline data found that African American first-time offenders were far more likely to be suspended than White first-time offenders for the same infraction.

**MYTH: Suspensions are necessary to deter future infractions.**

**FACT:** The opposite seems to be true. Students suspended in sixth grade are far more likely to be suspended in later grades. Further, by removing students from supervised settings, suspensions put students at greater risk for gang involvement, dropping out, and juvenile delinquency.

**MYTH: Suspensions will get parents' attention and help curb misbehavior.**

**FACT:** Suspensions disproportionately affect students living in poverty and those with single parents. Missing work to stay home with a suspended student can cost caregivers crucial income or even their jobs; parents who cannot miss work often end up leaving students unattended. Schools can better engage parents by working with them to identify solutions that support their children's needs or in implementing solutions that can improve the quality of school as a whole.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Districts, states, and Congress would improve outcomes by implementing the following research-based recommendations for creating fair and effective school discipline systems:

- Strengthen support and training for teachers on effective classroom and behavior management.
- Improve annual collection and reporting of discipline data, disaggregated by race, gender, disability status, ELL status, and free/reduced price lunch eligibility.
- Align discipline policy with academic achievement goals and require support and intervention – rather than punishment – for schools with disproportionately high suspension rates.