

The Myth of Effectiveness

Evidence from many studies suggests that out-of-school suspension is not effective in deterring behavior problems, and instead, is linked to harmful effects on schools and youth (see sidebar). Data shows that students who are suspended are more likely to engage in misbehavior in the future (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996).

Outcomes for Youth Who Are Suspended

- Higher rates of misbehavior (Tobin, et.al., 1996).
- Lower academic achievement (APA, 2006).
- Drop-out and school failure (Bowditch, 1993).
- Restricted access to school services such as counseling and social skills instruction (Townsend, 2000).
- Feelings of alienation, anxiety, rejection, diminished self-esteem, withdrawal (DeRidder, 1991).
- Feeling unwelcome at school (Civil Rights Project, 2000).
- Harm to healthy adult relationships (APA, 2006).
- Unsupervised time and increased opportunity for delinquency (Advancement Project, 2005).

Negative Outcomes for Schools

- Lower academic achievement (APA, 2006).
- Diminished relationships with families and communities. (DeRidder, 1991).
- Loss of average daily attendance (ADA) funding (Skiba & Knesting, 2001).
- Lower ratings of school governance (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Suspending students who engage in problem behaviors does not identify or address the students' underlying problems; instead, it prevents the student from obtaining school support services (Townsend, 2000). Suspension decreases access to instruction and increases academic difficulties.

Use of Suspension

In 2009-10, 84 percent of all disciplinary actions taken by school administrators in Minnesota public schools were out-of-school suspension, resulting in 52,652 suspensions and 110,033 missed instructional days. The majority of suspensions are for behaviors that do not endanger others. In Minnesota, only two percent of incidents involved a weapon. The top suspension incident type for the 2009-2010 school year was disruptive/disorderly conduct/insubordination. Over 2,500 suspensions were for absences, which only exacerbate the problem of poor attendance. Proponents of out-of-school suspensions believe that suspending a student from school will deter future behavior problems. Research evidence contradicts these beliefs.

Minnesota Demographic Data on Students Who are Suspended

Suspension is often used with students who can least afford to miss school. Suspension is applied disproportionately among student groups. Students who are more likely to be suspended are:

- American Indian, African American and Hispanic.
- Male.
- Low-achieving (Arcia, 2006).
- Identified as having a disability.
- From low-socioeconomic status (SES) families.

Disparities by race are not entirely due to economic status (Skiba et al., 2002). There is no evidence that African American students engage in higher rates of misbehavior (Skiba, 2002).

Rather, African American students may be disciplined more

severely for less serious or more subjective reasons (Skiba et al., 2002). Inadequate teacher training in classroom management and in culturally competent practices may be a factor in the disproportionality of discipline for students of color (APA, 2008).

Online Resources:

National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support

<http://www.pbis.org>

Minnesota PBIS Resources

www.pbismn.org

Further Reading:

Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?

American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>

Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis. Daniel Losen and Russell Skiba

http://www.whatkidscando.org/features/stories/2011/03_suspension_stories/pdf/Suspended_Education.pdf

Further Reading from the Minnesota Department of Education:

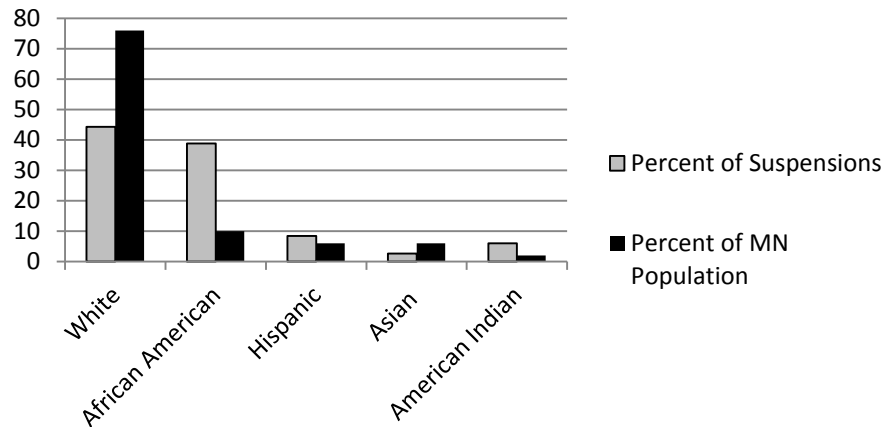
Alternatives-to-Suspension Fact Sheets:

- Multi-Tiered Behavior Support Systems that Reduce Out-of-School Suspensions
- Effective Classroom Management Practices

Dangerous Weapons and Disciplinary Incidents Report

SNAPSHOTs on Minnesota Youth

This graph shows the disparity in suspensions rates by racial group in Minnesota during the 2009-2010 school year:



How can we decrease out-of-school suspensions while maintaining a safe learning environment?

Decreasing suspensions requires a proactive, preventative, multi-tiered approach to supporting student behavior. One framework with evidence of effectiveness is Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS). See the Minnesota Department of Education's "Practices that Reduce Out-of-School Suspension: Fact Sheet 3" for more information.

References

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- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006). *Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools?* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>.
- Arcia, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students. *Education and Urban Society*, 38, 359-369.
- Bowditch, C. (1993). Getting rid of troublemakers: High school disciplinary procedures and the production of dropouts. *Social problems*, 40, 493-509.
- Civil Rights Project. (2000). *Opportunities suspended – The devastating consequences of zero tolerance and school discipline policies*. The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University.
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- Skiba, R. J., & Kesting, K. (2001). Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school disciplinary practice. In R. J. Skiba & G. G. Noam (Eds.) *New directions for youth development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Skiba, R.J., & Rausch, M.K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C.M. Everson & C.S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 1063-1089). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Tobin, T., Sugai, G., & Colvin, G. (1996). Patterns in middle school discipline records. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 4(2), 82-94.
- Townsend, B. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of African American learners: Reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children*, 66(3), 383-391.

Copies of fact sheets may be found on the MDE web site at: <http://education.state.mn.us> For more information please contact Cindy Shevlin-Woodcock (651) 582-8656 cindy.shevlin-woodcock@state.mn.us