



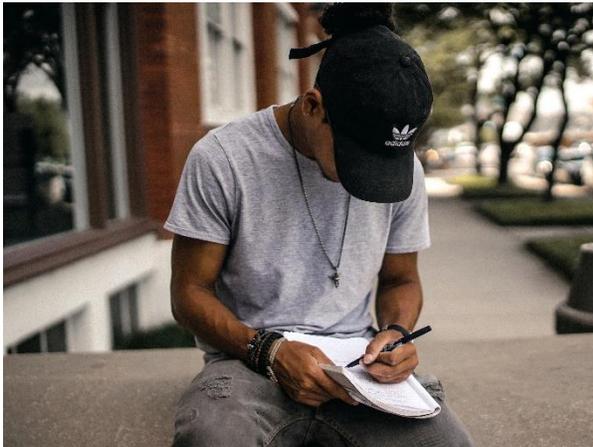
The State of School Discipline in Ohio

By Alison Paxson, Policy & Communications Associate

June 9, 2021

Every child contributes to the vibrancy and success of our communities. As adults, it is our job to make sure that children have what they need to thrive and flourish into adulthood – including access to health care, nutrition, safety, economic security, and good schools.

Part of a longtime organizational focus on education equity, the following issue brief presents updated data, research, analysis, and trends on the state of school discipline, school safety, and educational opportunity in Ohio, building off previous reports including, [Zero Tolerance and Exclusionary School Discipline Policies Harm Students and Contribute to the Cradle to Prison Pipeline \(2012\)](#); [School Discipline Policies and the Cradle to Prison Pipeline \(2017\)](#), and [School Resource Officers: Recommendations for Maximizing School Safety and Minimizing Risks to Ohio Children \(2018\)](#).



The Community to Prison Pipeline Josh is a friendly, outgoing 5th grade boy and is described by his friends as “fun” and “really smart.” During the pandemic, Josh’s world changed significantly. His father lost employment, his parents now argue often, and he has fallen behind on schoolwork and class participation due to his anxiety. Since Josh’s school re-opened at the beginning of the calendar year, his behavior, especially attention-seeking behavior, has become increasingly disruptive in class. For youth like Josh, schools must have policies in place to address their needs and dig into what is under the surface of these behaviors with

behavioral and mental health supports rather than punitive approaches that further push children away from engagement and separate them from opportunities for learning and the ability to be healthy and thrive.

Many schools have reflected the types of child-focused changes that are needed in policies, practices, behavioral interventions, discipline, and how children are treated in situations that make significant differences in whether a child faces exclusionary discipline or receives the behavioral health services they need to be ready to learn.

Children deserve a quality education and opportunities for bright and thriving futures – however, the Community to Prison Pipeline still places far too many children on a pathway to incarceration without opportunities to unlock their potentials and follow their dreams.

These children are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other children of color. Many live in families whose caregivers do not have access to living wages or health care and in communities more likely to experience insecurity in housing, nutrition, and in accessing basic necessities. Many may also have disabilities, identify as LGBTQIA+, and have experienced abuse or neglect or are in foster care.

The **Community to Prison Pipeline** is built through a convergence of social, economic, and political systems that inequitably distribute resources, power, and opportunities for children as they grow from childhood to adulthood. It persists by way of the policies and practices that are the foundations of these systems, which perpetuate unequal outcomes. As a result of the collective and disparate impact these systems have on our communities, the interactions that youth have with them, and what opportunities children are supported to derive from them, many marginalized youth are funneled into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The policies and practices within our institutions, such as our schools, play key roles in either feeding this pipeline or in its disruption.

Broadly speaking, the Community to Prison Pipeline starts with **systemic community disinvestment**. The zip code and geographic location of where a child is born, lives, and grows plays a significant role in what resources and opportunities are accessible to them and their families. Legacies of systemic oppression and racism in our policies and formal guidelines, such as red lining, have caused wide generational wealth and opportunity gaps among communities and neighborhoods. This is the foundation for an uneven playing field that places children and youth, especially children of color, more at risk of living in poverty, having unmet basic needs or untreated health issues, and experiencing poorer academic achievement, less economic opportunity, and greater likelihood of justice system involvement.ⁱ



Just as communities remain divided by deep racial and economic segregation, so do our schools within them. Nationally, nearly 1 in 5 students attend schools where most of their peers are both living in poverty and Black or Latinx.ⁱⁱ Ohio's school funding system has led to generations of **inequitably and inadequately funded schools**. Many have overcrowded classrooms with large class sizes, fewer high-quality teachers, less curricular

resources, and insufficient funds for special education teachers, counselors, social workers, nurses, and other support staff. It is true even that every school district in the country with high or moderate segregation along racial and economic lines has a large achievement gap.ⁱⁱⁱ

"Zero tolerance" policies were not designed to be used in schools and are not based in what is known about positive child development. Despite their lack of research, these policies were mandated in **school discipline policy** across the country amid a national debate on school safety. These policies have led to hostile school climates that lack safety and trust, disproportionately suspending and



expelling marginalized groups of students at high rates and played a significant role in making schools a key entry point into the justice system.



Under-resourced schools are also more likely to have increased reliance on **police in schools**, outsourcing discipline to School Resource Officers and law enforcement. Data shows that police officers hurt school climate and can actually make them less safe.^{iv} Studies have shown that their presence in schools makes it more likely children will enter the justice system by way of school-based arrests. Behavioral and mental health needs of children can be present in a variety of ways which

may be disruptive. In cases where police officers are employed in the school, they may be the person who is called on to address outbursts or behavioral issues, even though professionals who understand youth development are most appropriate to address their needs. These situations become critical for a child in that an adult without appropriate training may make the decision to arrest or use other punitive measures with that child. Nationwide, 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.^v

The end of the pipeline is **court involvement and juvenile detention**. Juvenile incarceration inflicts harm on children physically, mentally, and emotionally. These children face lifelong challenges to accessing education, economic security, health care, and opportunities to live well. According to a 2014 report, juvenile incarceration had a three year recidivism rate of 45% in Ohio, which means that nearly half of all children who have exited detention will be rearrested in that time period.^{vi} Nationwide, approximately 2 in 3 youth detained in juvenile facilities leave school without their G.E.D. or diploma after exiting the justice system.^{vii} Further, Ohio spends \$185,303 every year to incarcerate just one child.^{viii} These dollars would be more effectively spent on children, families, and communities in upstream investments to support their wellbeing and prevent their involvement in the justice system to begin with.



School Discipline is an Opportunity to Enhance Equity Post-Pandemic

Over the past year, our children and young adults have experienced the shared trauma that was the global pandemic. There have been tremendous losses in life and livelihood, diminished opportunities for relationships and socialization, and decreased access to school and community resources. The pandemic has further exacerbated pre-existing social inequities and compounded the barriers faced prior to COVID-19.

The Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan (ARP) represents an unparalleled investment in child and family wellbeing, and K-12 education. The ARP provides states funding to address short-term COVID relief in school districts and opportunity to invest in longer term changes that have the power to make public education more equitable and more whole child-focused.

We are seeing an incredible amount of energy and momentum to address lost instruction time in this moment, especially for children who have been primarily in virtual learning environments for the last twelve months. Recovering lost ground academically will be critical, and it will be a gradual process, not

easily fixed by drilling students in intensive summer school or longer school days. In these efforts, we must be careful that we don't adopt a deficit mentality focused solely on what our children have lost. Instead we must empower them by investing in their health and emotional well-being. Healthy children are better learners who are better equipped to overcome gaps in academic learning once they are physically, mentally, and emotionally well, and this will require education and health care systems to work in tandem to support our children.



While providing interventions in instructional needs and in child health will be critical for all students in the coming years post-pandemic, we must target these resources to students who have been impacted most. Especially for those hurdling gaps in access to technology, instruction, and other supports since COVID-19 began.

As schools across Ohio have reopened, many students have returned to their

school buildings with increased behavioral and mental health needs, stemming from a year of instability, household stress, trauma, and isolation, compounded for many by years of inequitable access to resources. The unfortunate fact is that these gaps in access are focused on children who are living poverty and oftentimes marginalized.

Time to Prioritize Health Equity as Integral to Education Equity

Now is the opportunity to recognize that what historically has been classified as disciplinary issues, even criminalized, are most often whole child needs that have gone unaddressed. It is with this basic understanding that schools and communities can begin to take steps forward in the right direction and elevate child health equity in tandem with education equity.

It is time to look at out-of-school punishments through the lens of lost instruction time and lost access to wellness services, to recognize that no disciplinary infraction, especially those minor and nonviolent, should ever result in the loss of these fundamental rights for our children. This is an opportunity to adjust our pre-pandemic policies and practices to intentionally address and enhance educational equity for all students. We must rethink our school discipline policies and practices post-pandemic to make Ohio a place where all children can thrive and live in dignity.

Many of these children's educational opportunities have been limited for years by policies and practices that have isolated, placed stigma upon, pushed out, and denied them in-person instructional time and school-based services as punishment.

In the 2015-2016 school year alone, out-of-school suspensions accounted for 11 million days of instruction lost - the equivalent of over 62,000 years of lost instruction - for students nationwide.^{ix} This represents lack of access to valuable in-person learning and to the services schools provide to support the whole child, which in effect is pushing these services further out of reach of the children who may

arguably benefit from them most to be healthier, safer, more engaged, supported, and challenged in their educations.

By continuing to discipline students as was the practice prior to the pandemic, prioritizing harsh and exclusionary practices over rehabilitative and restorative ones, it can be expected that the number of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions will rise. It can also be speculated that students who have left school or been chronically absent since the pandemic began may not return. Schools that push students out, make them feel unsafe, unengaged and as if they do not have a place in their own educations, while also lacking in resources to support their needs, may see a continued exodus of students.

The State of School Discipline in Ohio

We all want an educational system that supports children to learn and flourish into adulthood with opportunities to live well. However, this is simply not possible without addressing the state of school discipline in Ohio. This is especially important for us to recognize and act on now.

Across our state, children have returned to their school buildings for in-person education, some for the first time since school closures in March 2020. Many of our children and youth have returned with untreated health conditions, some newly emerged and others which may have worsened over the last year. In fact, in 2018-2019, 24% of school-age children who needed care coordination for common health issues did not receive it, and an even larger percentage, 41% of children in Ohio with special health care needs, did not receive any care coordination for these health issues in that year either.^x

Common health issues among Ohio children are asthma (11%), dental decay (18%) or cavities, and mental, emotional, developmental or behavioral problems (25%). We've also seen troubling suicide rates among Ohio's youth – particularly for young people ages 8-17 in Ohio's Appalachian region, which has rates today 1.5x higher than the overall rate in 2018.

Health Policy Institute of Ohio Fact Sheet: K-12 Student Wellness and Health Equity (March 26, 2021)

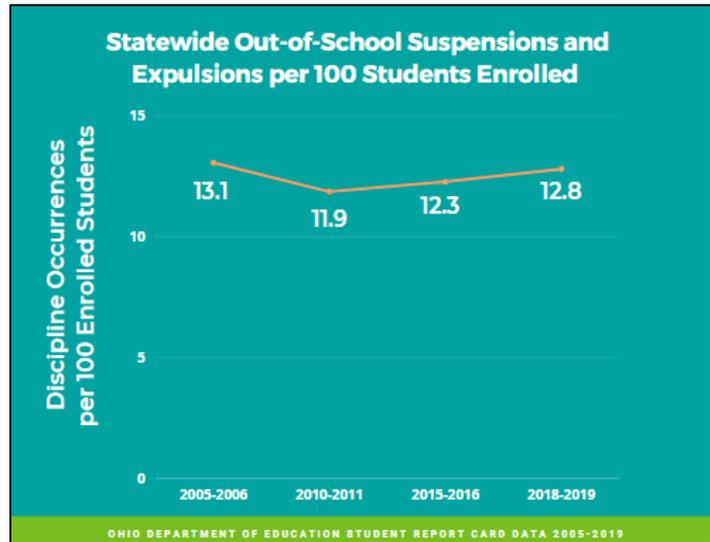
Chronic Absenteeism

Of further concern, some children and youth may not return to school at all, which will have significant ramifications for these children and our society in the years to come. According to recent data, nearly 1 in 4 Black children in Ohio (22%) were chronically absent during the 2019-2020 school year. For Latinx/Hispanic children, this was 15%. For White children, who had the lowest rate of chronic absence, 8%.^{xi}

It is critical that we focus our energies on ensuring our school buildings are safe, welcoming, and supportive environments where children feel valued. The frequency of their school building's use of exclusionary discipline factors greatly here, and the stakes are high right now. If schools fail to be the engaging, safe, and supportive spaces they should be for all students, students who have been disconnected from educational opportunities or have experienced the systemic violence of being pushed out of school by exclusionary discipline may never return.

Ohio continues to experience consistently high rates of suspensions and expulsions, despite heightened awareness of the research documenting the lifelong consequences that high rates of suspension can pose for a child’s learning and their long-term wellbeing.^{xii}

Over the past fifteen years, Ohio’s overall number of disciplinary occurrences per 100 students enrolled in public schools has remained relatively constant, rising slightly since the 2010-2011 school year. In the 2015-2016 school year, 7% of Ohio children received out-of-school suspensions compared with the national rate of 5%.^{xiii}



Fortunately, with the bi-partisan passage of the 2018 Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education (SAFE) Act, Ohio became one of just four states nationwide that has taken steps to limit the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for minor misconduct.^{xiv} This legislation prohibits a school’s use of out-of-school discipline for behavior that is nonviolent or disruptive for all children in pre-kindergarten through the third grade, except in certain very limited circumstances. While this is still being implemented in school districts, we do expect this to reduce the high rates of such occurrences in Ohio.

School discipline as an issue cannot be compartmentalized and separated from the other pressing issues in our schools and communities that must be addressed in tandem - such as chronic absenteeism,



inequitable school funding, graduation rates and educational gaps in achievement, and student social emotional learning, among others. Of course, this systemic perspective of education and the factors that create educational inequities must also recognize the immense, disproportionate harm that all of these issues have had on Black, Indigenous and other children of color due to racism and historical legacies of systemically oppressive policies and practices for generations in American society. Exclusionary school discipline that pushes children out of school represents just one piece of the school, or community, to prison pipeline and what Michelle Alexander has coined more broadly as “The New Jim Crow.”^{xv}

As one Black mother voiced recently when interviewed on her hesitance to send her child back to schools as they reopened, “If they didn’t keep my children safe before COVID, why would I think that they would now?”^{xvi} In short, we need our students to return to safe environments - particularly those most impacted by the pandemic and inequities that pre-existed it. That means more than just adequate personal protective equipment. It means environments where children of color are safe, welcome, and embraced by a positive school climate that has high expectations of them.

In the context of Ohio’s “zero tolerance” mandate, and its continued requirement to be implemented within all Ohio school districts, Ohio continues to face challenges in ensuring fair disciplinary treatment of all students, making some children disproportionately punished, pushed out, and less safe in their schools.

History of "Zero Tolerance" Policy

“Zero tolerance” policies originated during the federal government’s “War on Drugs”. These policies, later adapted to be in schools, were the strategies and strict punitive policies engaged in by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the criminal justice system, such as: mandatory sentencing laws; “three strikes” laws; and “broken windows” policing.

Spurred on by the “tough on crime” rhetoric of the 1980’s and 1990’s, these policies quickly gained traction, fueled by the prison industrial complex, and this led to a narrative of criminalization that was soon applied to youth and young adults, leading to a spike in juvenile arrests in the early 1990’s. At the time, a new theory, the “superpredator” theory, emerged asserting that the United States was now facing a looming threat: a generation of young “superpredators” who were capable of unimaginable violence. This led to a national debate on public safety, one whose momentum collided with a historically pervasive and expansive backdrop of racism and white supremacy.

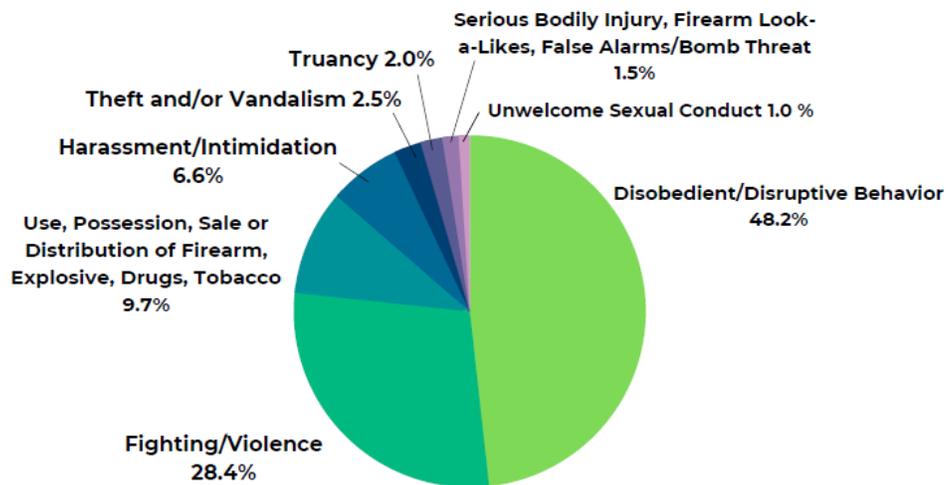
This theory ultimately rationalized the criminalization of Black and brown children, especially boys and young men, and played a large role in the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 meant to severely crack down on juvenile offenders and crime in K-12 schools. Fear mongering persisted, motivating political will for “zero tolerance” policies in schools, especially after the Columbine High School Massacre in 1999 further cemented “zero tolerance” policy footholds in public education nationwide. This, in turn, led to the suspension and expulsion of children at high and disparate rates, making them more likely to be justice system-involved through the school, or the community, to prison pipeline.

The Ohio legislature made changes in the Ohio Revised Code in 1998, requiring all school districts to include “zero tolerance” policies. These policies have contributed significantly to high rates of out of school punishment and exclusionary practices since its implementation.^{xvii}

“Zero tolerance” as a school discipline policy in particular imposes pre-determined, automatic, typically harsh punishments, such as out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, for a wide range of school violations. Although these policies were originally adopted to address serious and oftentimes violent offenses, this punitive policy has more often been enforced in cases of minor misconduct. The result is that children have been over-disciplined for nonviolent infractions, such as “disobedient and disruptive” behavior, dress code violations (often termed as “intimidation”), and what is typically age-appropriate behavior for children and adolescents.

According to data from the 2019-2020 school year, 59.9% of infractions that resulted in out-of-school punishment were for nonviolent behavior, with nearly half for “disobedient/disruptive behavior.” As these policies rely greatly on the personal discretion of school professionals, what is deemed “disruptive” or “disobedient” behavior has over time become more open to broader interpretation, leading to minor offenses being subject to harsh, automatic sanctions beyond what is just or called for. Further, many studies have demonstrated a link between educator and administrator bias in the rationale for disciplinary decisions where there is room for discretion.^{xviii}

Types of Disciplinary Infractions in 2019-2020



OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STUDENT REPORT CARD DATA 2019-2020

Bottom line, mounting evidence over the last two decades clearly shows that “zero tolerance” disciplinary policies are not effective in promoting school safety.

In fact, as early as 2009, the American Psychological Association convened a Zero Tolerance Task Force that analyzed ten years of research and concluded that “Zero Tolerance has not been shown to improve school climate or school safety” and also that these “policies as applied appear to run counter to our

best knowledge of child development.”^{xxix} We also know that in school environments where support for zero tolerance policies is strong, studies show that both teachers and students actually feel less safe.^{xx}

Moreover, research has consistently shown that harsh school discipline policies resulting in the removal of a child from school creates a less positive school climate, which is less conducive to learning, not only for those removed from school, but for all students in a school building, even “well-behaved” ones.^{xxi} These practices contribute to cultures of low expectations and reduce child trust in adults in their school buildings. According to a 2019 study, all students assigned to a particular school building with a high rate of suspensions were more likely to be arrested and incarcerated later in life and less likely to attend a four-year college, especially Black males.^{xxii}

Our current out-of-school disciplinary mandates are diametrically opposed to what children need right now to be supported in their whole child well-being, particularly after this traumatic year with increased prevalence of adverse childhood experiences that could lead to higher rates of disciplinary occurrences in the context of “zero tolerance”.

Disparities in Educational Opportunity & Access to School Services

As CDF-Ohio documented in previous reports, Ohio has disproportionately suspended and expelled some children at higher rates than others, in particular Black and other children of color, students with disabilities and/or diagnoses of emotional disturbance, and students who qualify as economically disadvantaged. According to the most recent data from the Ohio Department of Education, these trends persist today. While there has been an increase in the number of restorative practices in place of exclusionary discipline over the years in many school buildings throughout Ohio, some types of disparities have become more pronounced. The Black-White gap in school discipline hit a peak in 2015-2016 and has remained pervasive in our state over the last 15 years. In examination of data disaggregated by both race and gender, it is also clear that the discipline gap here is pronounced also.

According to a national report calling attention to disparities in the opportunity to learn due to out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-2016 school year, Ohio had the fourth largest Black-White gap of all states in days of lost instruction at the secondary level.^{xxiii} This means that for every 100 Ohio high

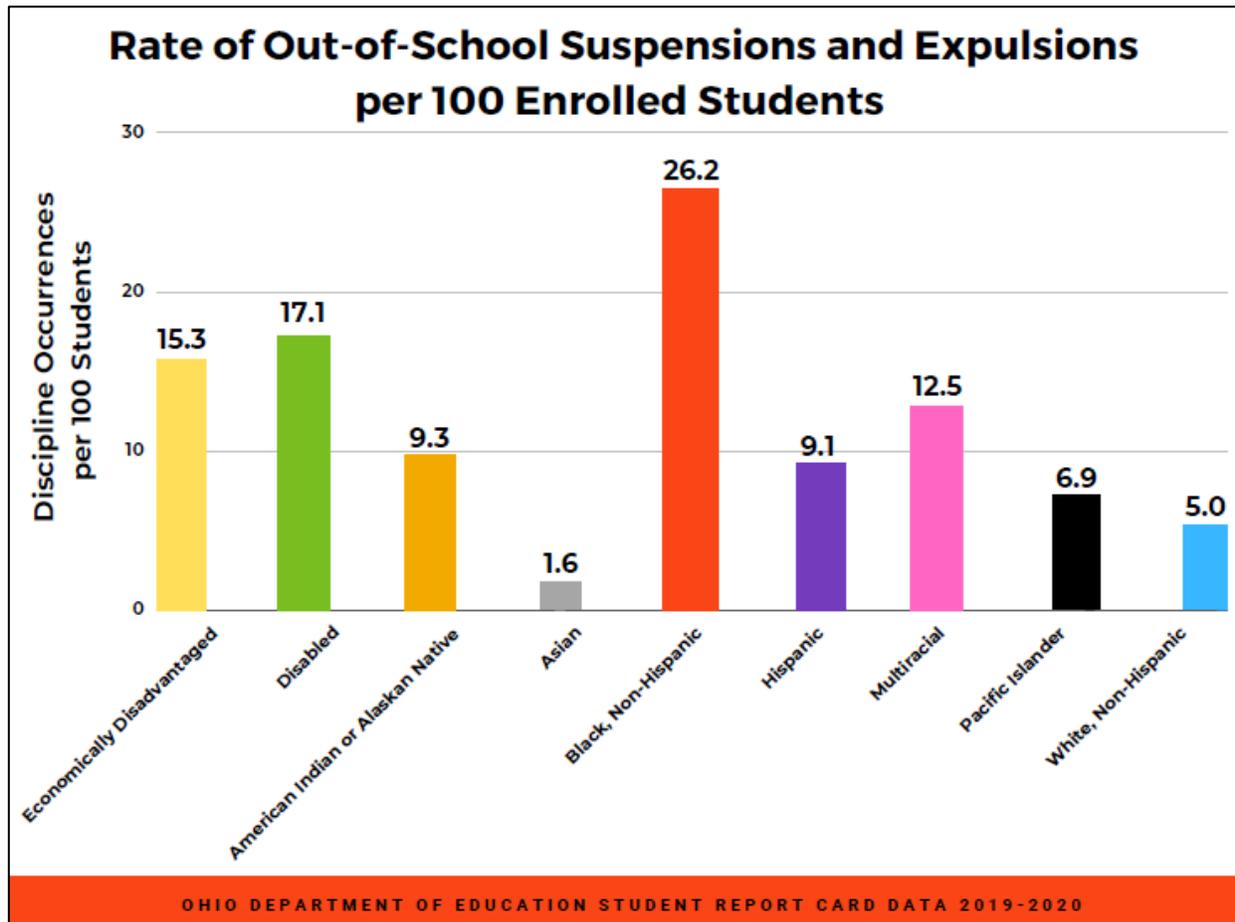


school students enrolled that year, there was a gap of 127 days of lost instruction between Black students and White students due to out-of-school discipline disparities.

For other historically marginalized students, disparities persist as well. Using an intersectional lens to understand the ways in which students’ intersecting

identities contribute to increased risk for harsh discipline, and ultimately, lost access to educational opportunity, is critical.

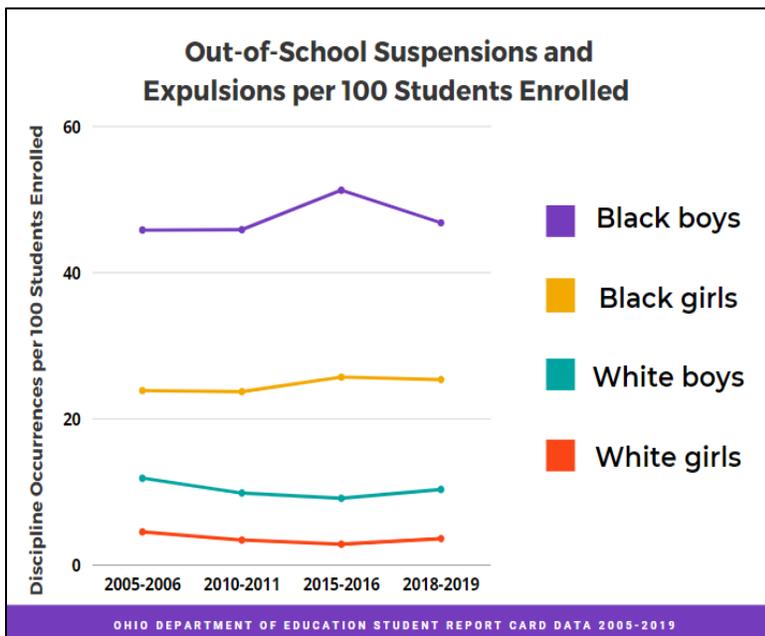
Although this is not an exhaustive list of factors and identities that place some children at higher risk of being subject to harsh discipline and criminalization (e.g. children in the child welfare system, children who identify as LGBTQIA+, etc.), on the following pages, we analyze data on disparities in exclusionary discipline in further detail by: race and ethnicity; disability; poverty and economic disadvantage; school typology and geography; and by school type (community vs. traditional public schools).



Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Race & Ethnicity

Looking at longitudinal data from 2005-2019, the disparities in the Black-White discipline gap are stark. Compared to White boys, Black boys in Ohio were 4.5x more likely to have disciplinary action leading to out-of-school suspension or expulsion in the 2018-2019 school year.

The racial disparities that persist are further pronounced when disaggregated by gender. Although Black boys were the most likely demographic to receive out-of-school punishment, we found that the biggest disparity overall in disproportionate punishment by race and gender is between Black girls and White girls. In fact, during the 2018-2019 school year, Black girls faced 7x more out-of-school suspensions than White girls.



Black children, especially Black girls, face a higher risk of suspension or expulsion for subjective behavioral violations, like dress code violations or insubordination.^{xxiv} Research points to a differential pattern of treatment and implicit bias of authority figures who have historically judged them more harshly, creating disparities in office referrals and punishment. Further, a study on “adultification bias” of Black girls found that Black girls as young as 5 were viewed by adults to be “less innocent” than White girls.^{xxv}

As Monique W. Morris argues in *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, Black girls have less opportunity to be children and are subject to “age compression”, more likely to be viewed as Black women and oftentimes assigned false racial stereotypes perpetuated about Black women (e.g. defiant, loud, hypersexual, etc.).^{xxvi} This has far-reaching implications on school discipline and the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and it absolutely contributes to the criminalization of Black girls at higher rates than other demographics in Ohio and across the country.

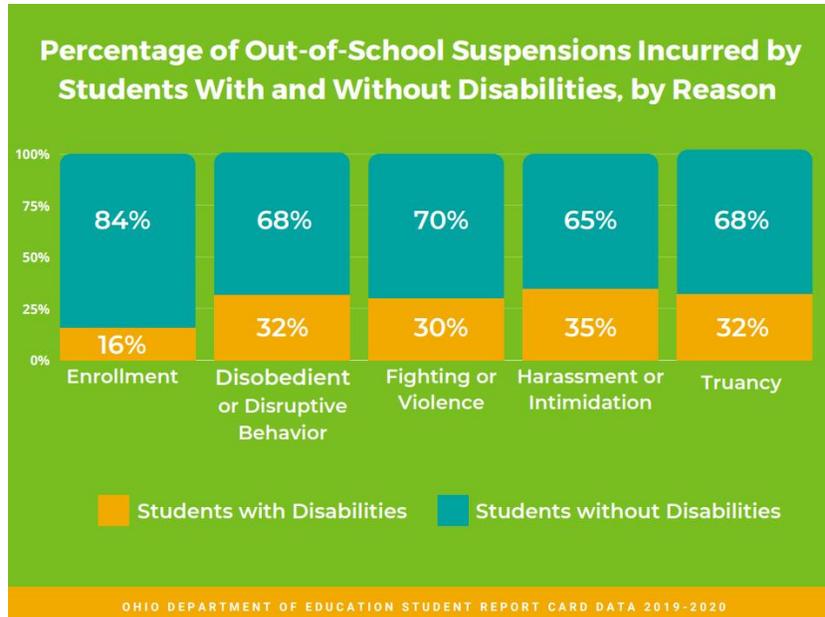
Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Disability

Although students with disabilities represented just 16% of Ohio students (270,589) enrolled in public schools in 2019-2020, these students were disproportionately suspended for more non-violent infractions compared to their enrolled peers without disabilities.

Students with disabilities have faced unique and significant challenges during pandemic virtual learning, especially on top of those that preexisted COVID-19. Children and adults with disabilities have long been subject to ableist assumptions and punished and criminalized at high rates in the United States, and today, this continues to be true where, in fact, 50% of all people killed by police have a disability and more than half of all disabled Black Americans have been arrested by time they turned 28 years-old.^{xxvii}

For disabled students to be adequately supported post-pandemic, we must increase funding for students with disabilities. While the federal government promised to cover 40% of all additional costs to educate students with disabilities when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed 50 years ago, it has failed to do so, even while the number of disabled students has increased by 25% nationwide.^{xxviii}

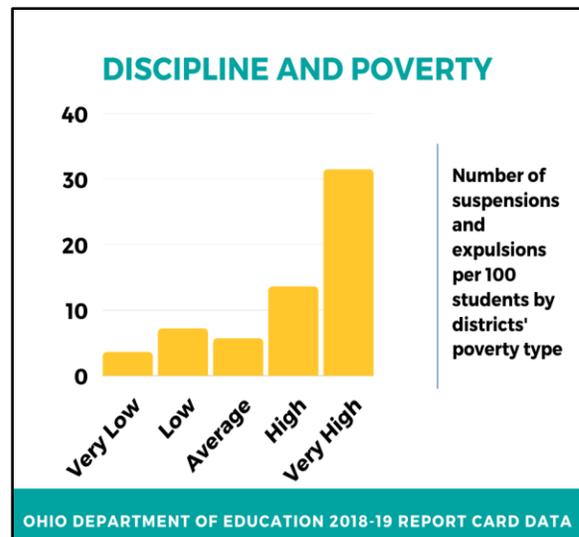
A 2021 report from the Civil Rights Project even calls out Ohio’s inequitable school funding system among its recommendations for the federal government to step in “to eliminate the shortages of counselors, social workers, nurses, school psychologists and well trained fully certified special education teachers” which contribute greatly to disparate rates of discipline.^{xxix} While this shortage is a significant problem nationwide, it is particularly concerning in Ohio, where the distribution of resources to school districts to provide for these services is inadequate. The Fair School Funding Plan proposal for a new state school funding model, currently being deliberated, includes a directive for a cost study to review and update the special education weights that were last updated in 2007. This would be a good start toward addressing funding gaps for students with disabilities in Ohio.



Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Poverty & Economic Disadvantage

Poverty and economic disadvantage also factor greatly into the likelihood of being harshly disciplined in Ohio.

Research shows that students in districts with “very high” proportions of student populations in poverty in particular are nearly 10x as likely as those in districts with “very low” levels of poverty to face out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. In fact, when compared to their peers in districts with even “high” poverty, these students are more than twice as likely to be suspended or expelled in Ohio according to 2018-2019 report card data from the Ohio Department of Education.

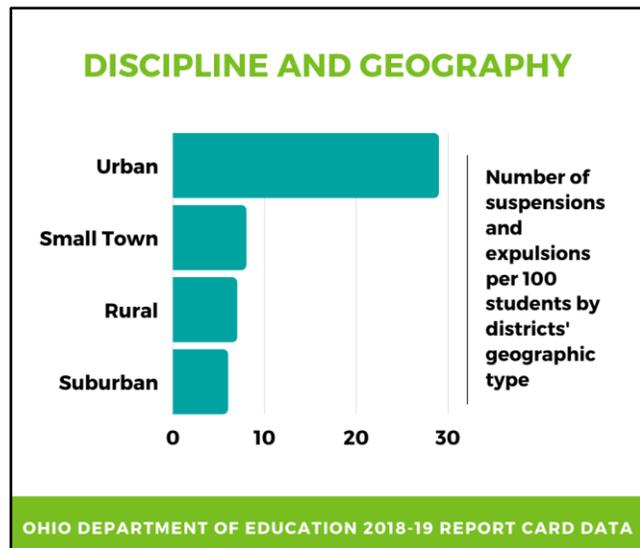


Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Ohio School Typology & Geography

The likelihood of experiencing out-of-school punishment varies significantly based on school typology and geography in Ohio.

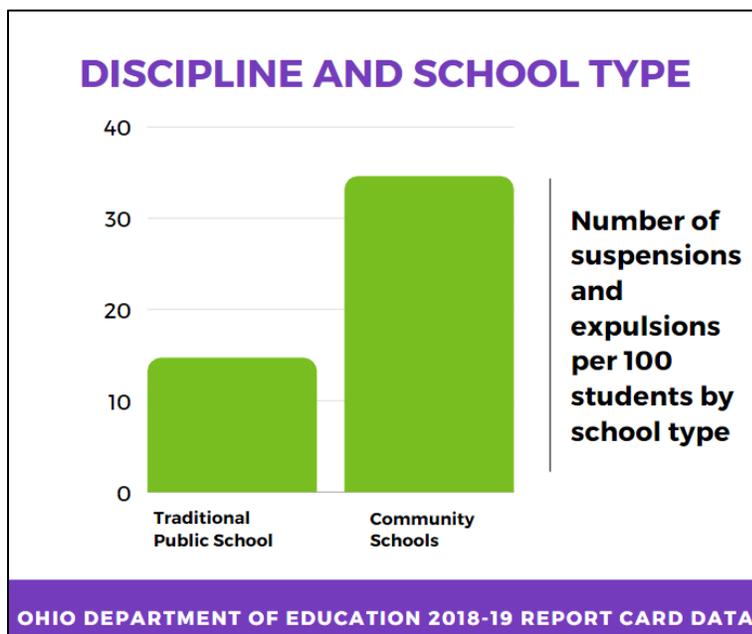
Ohio students in urban districts are suspended or expelled from school more often than their peers in small town, rural, or suburban school typologies, according to the ODE report card data from 2018-2019.

This number of suspensions and expulsions per 100 students in an urban district (29 out of 100) is nearly five times higher than suburban districts (6 out of 100).



Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity: Ohio’s Public Schools and Community Schools

Community schools, or charter schools, are exempt from many state education laws, and while this does include an exemption from the “zero tolerance” policy mandate,^{xxx} the data shows that this does not correlate to a less punitive and exclusionary school environment.



According to school report card data from the 2018-2019 school year, Ohio’s community schools meted out exclusionary punishment (suspension or expulsion) at a much higher rate than our state’s traditional public schools.

In fact, community schools suspended or expelled nearly 35 students per 100 enrolled. This is more than twice the number of students punished with out of school removal in Ohio’s traditional public schools (approximately 15 per 100 enrolled).

While further analysis is needed to understand why Ohio’s charter schools are serving out of school punishment to children at disproportionately higher rates, it is reasonable to speculate their exemption from certain rules could



result in higher rates of out-of-school discipline. This includes the exemption of charter schools from training and qualifications requirements for School Resource Officers and other accountability measures.^{xxxix}

Recommendations: The Pandemic is an Opportunity to Rethink the Future of School Discipline in Ohio

Adjust pre-pandemic policy to intentionally address and enhance educational equity. Continuing to measure how well children

jump over barriers rather than address the barriers themselves will mean our school systems will continue to fall short in creating the supportive, safe, and welcoming environments that all children deserve and are able to learn better within.

To enhance education equity for the long-term benefit of all Ohio children, Ohio must:

- **Enact state legislation to amend Ohio Revised Code and eliminate the “zero tolerance” policy mandate.**

Senate Bill 34, introduced in 2015 in the Ohio Senate, proposed amending Ohio Revised Code to remove the “zero tolerance” mandate, but this legislation received only one hearing before dying in the Senate Education Committee. In the absence of such state policy change, many negative trends contributing to the community to prison pipeline have persisted and will continue to do so without appropriate action. This legislation removed the requirement that each Ohio school district have zero tolerance policy for violent, disruptive, and inappropriate student behavior, and required districts to adopt a new policy for discipline that allows for all factors to be considered prior to out-of-school suspensions or expulsions. Removing this mandate will place our education system in greater alignment with Ohio’s strategic plan for education, *Each Child, Our Future* and the Whole Child Framework.^{xxxix}

- **Implement Restorative Justice Practices.** Restorative justice and restorative practices offer an alternative to punitive discipline policies that are: more equitable; evidence-based in making schools safer; improves school climate; fosters healthy, trusting relationships between educators and students; decreases disciplinary disparities; engages meaningful parent and community input and buy-in; and promotes greater accountability in education systems. This alternative results in less reliance on the juvenile and criminal justice systems, lower rates of chronic absenteeism, higher academic achievement, and better long-term outcomes for children and their communities.
- **Enhance access to school-based and community connected care.** Health inequities underlie key entry points to the community to prison pipeline. One way we can improve the health of students and their families is by dedicating state funding to expand access to school-based and community-connected care. School-based health care is most effective

when it is integrated in both the school and the community. Children and families need access to medical homes that provide high-quality, continuous, and comprehensive health care services especially during times when schools are not in session. While every district's needs are unique, there are many promising models for leveraging community partnerships in school-based and community health. Student Wellness and Success Funds hold promise in helping to fund community partnerships with school districts. This should be accompanied by the filing of a State Plan Amendment (SPA) to permit Medicaid to cover eligible services to all Medicaid-enrolled students.

- **Ensure Student Wellness and Success Funds target child mental and behavioral health needs.**

Challenges in child mental and behavioral health are on the rise, and this past year has been especially difficult and traumatic for many. Student Wellness and Success Funds must be protected in Ohio's biennial budget (HB 110). The House passed budget included these funds, however they were rolled into the Fair School Funding Plan as part of the phased in implementation. Though CDF-Ohio is supportive of the Fair School Funding Plan and its implementation, we also recognize the importance of the Student Wellness and Success Funding, and we advocate for these investments to be protected and used for their intended purpose to serve child mental and behavioral health needs. Ohio can and must fund both.

- **Support adequate and equitable funding of our state's schools through the Fair School Funding Plan.**

Disparities in education funding contribute to segregated schools and communities. In order for schools to be safe places where student learning and wellbeing is prioritized, they must also be adequately and equitably funded to support the cost of educating and nurturing all children who attend them.

Now is the time to make the choice to prioritize bright, thriving futures, ripe with opportunity, for all children. Realizing this future will require systemic changes to interrupt the community to prison pipeline by ensuring children have access to the professionals and services they need to be healthy and ready to learn, end exclusionary practices in schools, and enhance equitable educational opportunities throughout Ohio.

Endnotes:

- ⁱ Children’s Defense Fund. The State of America’s Children. (2020). <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-State-Of-Americas-Children-2020.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ *Id.*
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*
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