School Discipline Consensus Project
Survey of School System Leaders

The School Superintendents Association (AASA) and the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG Justice Center) surveyed more than 450 school system leaders in February 2013 as part of the School Discipline Consensus Project.[1] The consensus project is administered by the CSG Justice Center in coordination with the Supportive School Discipline Initiative launched by the U.S. Attorney General and the U.S. Secretary of Education in July 2011. It is supported by a public-private partnership that includes the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, NoVo Foundation, The California Endowment, and The Atlantic Philanthropies. The project will culminate in a comprehensive report that will provide policy and practice recommendations and implementation guidance on minimizing the dependence on suspension and expulsion to manage student behaviors, improving students' academic outcomes, reducing their involvement in the juvenile justice system (including alternative strategies to school-based arrests and direct court referrals when appropriate), and promoting safe and productive learning environments.[2]

Responses to the AASA-CSG Justice Center survey shed new light on current student discipline policies and practices in school districts across the country. The survey focuses primarily on issues related to school climate and culture, behavioral health, and safety. The results also provide insight into the challenges school districts face in improving their discipline systems.

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[1] Demographic information of the respondents:
- 86 percent Superintendents and 14 percent Other district cabinet members
- 69 percent Rural, 23 percent Suburban, and 8 percent Urban

[2] For more information on the School Discipline Consensus Project, visit http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/projects/school-discipline-consensus-project/. To receive updates on the project, register at http://csgjusticecenter.org/subscribe/ and indicate your interest in "youth" issues.

Key Findings

- Survey respondents rated behavior management plans, mentoring, and in-school suspensions as the most effective alternatives to out-of-school suspension and expulsion in improving student behavior and school climate.

- Survey respondents reported that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline (CMCD)[3] are the most effective prevention strategies for improving school climate and reducing the need for disciplinary action.

- The two challenges to successfully implementing alternatives to out-of-school suspensions/expulsions and comprehensive prevention strategies that were repeatedly cited were staff time demands and limited resources.

- Fifty-six percent of survey respondents indicated that their district recently revised their student code of conduct. The most common change made was instituting a graduated system of responses to misbehavior.

- Almost all (96 percent) of the survey respondents that indicated that their district has a school-based officer in at least one of their schools reported that these officers had a positive effect on the school environment.

CODES OF CONDUCT

➢ Fifty-six percent of all survey respondents indicated that their district recently revised their student code of conduct.

  o In the districts where codes of conduct were recently revised, school leaders were nearly unanimously (97 percent) involved in revisions, and teachers were involved in 81 percent of districts' revisions. School support staff were involved in about 60 percent of districts' revisions to codes of conduct followed by parents at 51 percent.

  o Less involved in these revision processes were students (38 percent), community members (37 percent), law enforcement (28 percent), clinicians (16 percent), and child welfare workers (11 percent).

➢ In districts that recently revised their codes of conduct, changes were varied, with the most common changes resulting in a new graduated system of responses to misbehavior and modifications to the types of offenses that

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[3] Consistency Management & Cooperative Discipline® (CMCD®) fosters student self-discipline and personal responsibility by forging positive teacher-student relationships, creating organized learning environments, improving instruction, and cooperatively establishing classroom discipline procedures. CMCD supports teachers in the transition of students taking responsibility for classroom operations and subsequently for their own learning behaviors. Additional information is available at http://cmcd.coe.uh.edu/

warrant removal. Of the 56 percent of districts that made code of conduct changes, other revisions included the following:

- o Improved data collection related to disciplinary actions (43 percent)
- o Increased use of non-punitive responses to student misbehavior (37 percent)
- o More limited use of suspension and expulsion (32 percent)
- o Change in definition of law enforcement role in schools (29 percent)
- o Greater education services provided to students who are removed from school (28 percent)
- o Changes to due process clauses (e.g., notifications, appeals, waiting periods) (23 percent)
- o Inclusion of referral to mental health counselor (23 percent)
- o Decreased allowable length of suspension (21 percent)
- o Increased measures to address racial/gender/other disparities (17 percent)
- o More expansive use of suspension and expulsion (6 percent)

A SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

- ➢ More than 80 percent of survey respondents reported providing professional development to educators related to school climate, with the most common areas of focus being classroom management, engaging instruction, and positive behavioral supports.

- ➢ Survey respondents reported funding for education support staff (counselors, social workers, etc.) and professional development/training as their greatest needs in establishing positive school climates and implementing prevention strategies. Additionally, staff time demands, inadequate resources, and competing priorities were the greatest challenges to implementing effective prevention strategies.

- ➢ Survey respondents rated the following alternatives to out-of-school suspension and expulsion as the most effective in improving student behavior and school climate:

  - o Behavior management plans (58 percent)
  - o Mentoring (55 percent)
  - o In-school suspensions (51 percent)

- ➢ Survey respondents from urban districts found mentoring to be a more effective alternative to improving behavior and school climate (76 percent) than their suburban and rural counterparts (59 percent and 50 percent, respectively). Peer

mediation was also more highly rated by urban respondents (56 percent found it to be an effective alternative), compared to suburban (36 percent) and rural respondents (24 percent). Additionally, urban leaders rated in-school suspension as less effective (32 percent) than did suburban (54 percent) and rural (51 percent) leaders.

➢ The biggest challenges cited by survey respondents to implementing alternative discipline models were staff time demands and other insufficient resources.

   o Weak partnerships, competing priorities, inadequate parent buy-in, and lack of professional development/training were also seen as challenging.

   o Additional implementation challenges cited with less frequency were lack of information on what works, not enough staff buy-in, inadequate staff skills, insufficient school leadership, and incomplete student data.

➢ A majority of survey respondents did not have experience with youth courts, restorative circles, or community conferencing.[4]

TARGETED AND INTENSIVE SUPPORTS

➢ Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents reported that their district uses an early warning data system (EWS) to identify students at risk of academic failure, dropout, delinquency, or behavioral issues.

   o Of the 57 percent of respondent districts with an EWS, 81 percent indicated that they use general purpose funding for the development and implementation of this system.

   o Seventy-one percent of these districts with EWSs include mechanisms to track and monitor behavioral and academic interventions in these systems.

   o Of the districts with EWSs, 89 percent track out-of-school suspensions, 84 percent track in-school suspensions, 87 percent track office referrals, and 59 percent track expulsions.

➢ More urban respondents indicated that their district (78 percent) use an EWS to identify students at risk of academic failure, dropout, delinquency, or behavioral issues than their suburban and rural counterparts (58 percent and 55 percent, respectively).

➢ Survey respondents with an EWS used data to inform the following:

   o School improvement planning (81 percent)

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[4] These restorative approaches are used as alternatives to suspensions and move away from punitive measures to focus on restoring relationships, creating a culture of responsible citizenship, and emphasizing problem-solving efforts.

- o Professional development and training (66 percent)
- o School accountability (52 percent)
- o Resource and staff allocation (51 percent)
- o Budgeting (36 percent)
- o School leader evaluation (28 percent)
- o Teacher evaluation (23 percent)

➤ Suburban survey respondents (57 percent) indicated that they were most likely to employ student support teams in at least half of their middle and high schools. Fewer than half of the urban (42 percent) and rural (30 percent) respondents currently use student support teams.[5]

➤ Survey respondents identified staff-time demands and inadequate resources as the biggest challenges facing student support teams followed by lack of sufficient professional development/training, inadequate partnerships with providers/agencies, and federal privacy laws (FERPA, HIPAA) or state privacy mandates.

➤ Two-thirds of survey respondents (67 percent) reported providing professional development on behavioral health issues, with the most common areas of focus being behavioral disorders such as ADHD (80 percent), alcohol and substance abuse (68 percent), and developmental disabilities (66 percent). Only 30 percent provide professional development on trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

➤ The most common external agencies with which survey respondents reported having written agreements to provide behavioral health supports were:
- o Mental health (77 percent)
- o Child welfare/social services (58 percent)
- o Alcohol and substance abuse (49 percent)
- o Juvenile justice (45 percent)

➤ Most respondents (80 percent) reported that their district did not sponsor school-based health centers.

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[5] Student support teams are interdisciplinary teams at the school level that identify students at risk of academic failure, dropout, disciplinary actions, or behavioral health issues; provide them with targeted and intensive interventions; and monitor progress over time.

POLICIES FOR STUDENTS REMOVED FROM SCHOOL

➢ The majority of survey respondents indicated that their districts (81 percent) send work home for students to complete when they are removed from school for fewer than 10 days. Access to online learning is provided by 30 percent of the school district respondents, while 18 percent provide students with a tutor.

➢ About half (51 percent) of survey respondents indicated that their districts enroll students in an alternative education program when they are removed from school for *more than* 10 days. This was followed by work sent home (48 percent), access to online learning (39 percent), and access to a tutor (34 percent). Thirteen percent indicated that their district does not have policies that require education services for students who are removed from school for more than 10 days.

➢ Regarding students who are expelled, 45 percent of the survey respondents reported enrolling these students in alternative education programs, while 33 percent have no policy requiring education services for expelled students. Other policies districts are using include offering online learning opportunities (32 percent), providing a tutor (19 percent), and transferring students to another traditional educational campus (8 percent).

➢ Alternative education programs for students who are suspended or expelled are more commonly used in urban (73 percent) and suburban (68 percent) districts than in rural districts (43 percent).

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS/LAW ENFORCEMENT

➢ Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated that their districts have school resource officers present in more than half of their middle and high schools. Forty-three percent reported that law enforcement officials or school-based officers were not present in any of their district's schools.

➢ Of the 39 percent of districts that reported a law enforcement presence in at least half of their schools, 90 percent reported that these officers are armed.

➢ For those districts that reported a law enforcement presence on at least one of their campuses, officers perform the following functions:
  o Safety planning (89 percent)
  o Patrol (campus and hallways) (87 percent)
  o Arrests (75 percent)
  o Mentoring (65 percent)
  o Enforcing school code of conduct (48 percent)
  o Ticketing (47 percent)
  o Activity leaders (27 percent)

➢ Of the 57 percent of survey respondents who indicated that their district has at least one middle school or high school with a school-based officer, nearly all (96 percent) reported these officers had a positive effect on the school environment.