TeachME PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CEUs for Teachers and Educators

Exploring Policies and Disparities in School Discipline

Introduction

School discipline encompasses the various consequences, strategies, rules and regulations that exist to reinforce specific behaviors in a student population. Such practices are seen as a set of rigid rules that are firm and necessary in order to have a peaceful, safe school atmosphere *and* as a means to help our students grow up to be productive, law-abiding citizens.

Unfortunately, this isn't what the data says happens when we administer discipline. In fact, the past years have told us that there are crucial disparities associated with discipline, particularly exclusionary discipline. In addition, when students experience exclusionary discipline, they often go on to be involved in repeated infractions—which may tell us something about the efficacy of our discipline practices, if we're willing to listen.

School districts across the nation are leaving exclusionary discipline practices behind and implementing restorative justice instead. As a result, we are (en masse) working toward healthier school climates. Importantly, the reduction of exclusionary discipline practices will help us pay closer attention to our students' actual needs, and it will help us to stop unfairly doling out punishments in larger numbers to the students who most need our help.

In this course, we'll discuss the various disciplinary policies that may need to see an update, the effect they're having on our students, and alternatives that may help us better care for our students going forward.

Section 1: The State of Discipline in United States Schools

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of school discipline policies, it's important to look at how we currently implement discipline, and the immediate impacts that such practices may be having on all students involved.

One of the primary forms of discipline that exists throughout schools in the United States is 'exclusionary discipline,' which has resulted from zero tolerance policies intended to prevent school violence and enhance safety for students.

What is exclusionary discipline, and why is it a problem?

Exclusionary discipline has been a mainstay of corrective action for a very long time. However, this does not mean that it's an effective method. Exclusionary discipline involves removing a child from school or even the academic community for a period of time after an infraction. While, in theory, a time-out may seem merited, this type of exclusionary discipline—when taken to extremes—can mean that a student misses out on valuable instruction time (and valuable time in which social behaviors are taught). In many cases, this strategy only serves to compound the problem (De la Rosa, 2021).

Moreover, it's increasingly clear that exclusionary discipline doesn't serve children in the long run—and this type of discipline seems to disproportionately affect students who may require the most amount of support. For example, in one recent school year, the ACLU reported that exclusionary discipline in the form of out-of-school suspensions cost the American academic community 66 million hours of lost instruction. Black students and students who have disabilities made up the majority of those cases (De la Rosa, 2021).

Findings such as these have caused experts to weigh in on exclusionary discipline. The American Psychological Association offered a working definition:

"Exclusionary discipline encompasses any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting" (American Psychological Association Services) (Smizer, 2021).

APA experts and several studies, including research out of the United States government, show that exclusionary discipline affects boys, students of color, and students with disabilities far more often than their peers. Interestingly, this trend remains true regardless of other factors, such as the average income level of students attending a specific school (Smizer, 2021).

Perhaps due to the very nature of exclusionary discipline—e.g., that it causes and even strengthens a break between student and school—it's clear that there is a link between instances of exclusionary discipline and students who drop out of school or exhibit increasingly unacceptable in-school behavior. The demographics associated with this trend, as well, have led to a theory termed 'disproportionality.' (Smizer, 2021)

What is disproportionality?

Disproportionality is the idea that there are some educational practices—such as exclusionary discipline—that tend to put specific groups of people at a higher risk of receiving severe and potentially harmful (or unhelpful) forms of discipline. These types of discipline are considered unhelpful or harmful because studies have shown that they are correlated with higher rates of potentially avoidable outcomes, such as school dropout, academic failure, and even incarceration (Smizer, 2021).

While this concept is unfortunate, it does give way to its own potential solution. By realizing that there are consistent consequences associated with exclusionary discipline and other similar punitive measures and noticing that we as a community tend to administer these disciplinary practices disproportionately to the students who most need our help, we can start to make steps toward more equitable justice and more restorative rerouting practices (Smizer, 2021).

It's not all the fault of the educators, of course. Many educators realize that there is a disciplinary disparity, but they note that the solutions available to them for disciplinary strategies aren't exactly wide-ranged. In addition, educators need some type of easy solution for administering rerouting solutions or (for lack of a better word) disciplinary mediation when faced with in-the-moment escalation (e.g., when a student suddenly acts out in class, and, perhaps, is not responsive to initial attempts at soothing) (Smizer, 2021).

Clearly, it will take a great deal of research, trial and error, and persistence to effect real change in terms of unfair disciplinary practices and policies. By starting to ask the pertinent questions and track the relevant data, however, we can hope to make progress in the right direction—soon (Smizer, 2021).

When a student starts exhibiting negative behaviors, what are the questions we should be asking?

We should begin to answer this question by acknowledging that educators rarely have the time for ample reflection when a student begins demonstrating behaviors that need correcting. For the purposes of this section, note that we are not saying that these questions are ones that educators need to pause and consider in the heat of the moment. Educators have enough on their plates already! In addition, as we noted above,

the established systems of discipline that educators may have available to them may be beyond their control (Smizer, 2021).

Rather, in order to initiate a comprehensive overhaul of our educational disciplinary systems, we need to reframe our focus from how to shut down undesirable behavior to what may be the root cause of that behavior. As such, in this section, we'll propose some hypothetical questions that teachers could ask of themselves or their students prior to administering exclusionary discipline (Smizer, 2021).

For example, prior to issuing a disciplinary recommendation, instead of merely considering how to stop the situation in front of them as efficiently as possible (e.g., by excluding the student exhibiting problematic behavior from the community), an educator could wonder (Smizer, 2021):

- Why is my student deciding to act out in this way?
- Are there any reasons that I don't know about that could be influencing the student's decision to misbehave?
- Are there factors affecting this student that I should know about before determining the severity of the consequence?
- Is the consequence I'm about to recommend one that all students, regardless of demographic, will consistently have to experience?
- If I'm considering exclusionary discipline in this case, is my student acting out so severely that addressing this issue is worth that individual losing out on instructional time?

One issue that will require deft consideration, too, is this: While exclusionary discipline is problematic, in the current way that school is set up, educators do need a way to maintain behavioral standards, perhaps even a way to address individual students exhibiting particular behaviors, while still meeting the needs of the entire classroom (Smizer, 2021).

Although we have yet to land upon a universal method for meeting this problem, researchers are sifting through large amounts of academic data to see if we can start by being able to identify key trends in recent academic incident reporting. New approaches to school discipline that are emerging because of this research are known as restorative justice techniques and PBIS, or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Smizer,

2021). We'll go into these systems in more detail in the third section of this course. Next, we'll discuss recent responses at a government level to the issue of disproportionality.

What is the Biden Administration doing to help work toward fairness and racial equity in school discipline?

Establishing greater equity and fairness around school discipline has been a priority for the past several presidential administrations. The United States Department of Education is currently reopening this initiative and examining it like the civil rights debate that it is. Recently, the agency was accepting public comments to gather data on school climate and discipline. It did this in order to figure out how to invest in school capacity and infrastructure to improve school climates—and thereby, hopefully, reduce the amount of discriminatory discipline (Blad, 2021).

The government can help in one of three ways: Policy guidance, financial assistance, or technical assistance. From early 2021, Biden's administration was exploring how to provide these practical supports to schools nationwide. The previous administrations had dramatically different outlooks upon this issue. (Back in 2014, Obama's administration was able to issue guidance that was nonbinding about the impact of exclusionary discipline.) Biden's handling of the issue will be informed not only by this, but by the fact that in 2021 (and beyond) the nation is undergoing an awakening to the realities of systemic racism (Blad, 2021).

The Department of Education collected public data through most of 2021, and analysis is ongoing. For years, since Obama's non-binding statements about exclusionary discipline, there have been concerns from people nationwide about the school-to-prison pipeline, the civil rights violations of discriminatory discipline, and the need to consider practical and more therapeutic disciplinary strategies. As Obama's guidance was non-binding (and as the Trump administration rescinded that guidance in 2018), it has been very difficult to glean hard data, change actual regulations, and see the real benefits of rethinking exclusionary discipline (Blad, 2021).

The disciplinary data the Biden administration has collected continues to show that we clearly need change. During the 2017-2018 school year, it was found that Black students made up 15 percent of the enrolled students in schools nationwide, yet were involved in 38 percent of out-of-school suspensions (Blad, 2021).

Students who have disabilities or special needs were also disproportionately represented: This population of students represents 13 percent of enrolled students, but 25% of suspensions. To jumpstart policy change across the nation and to support these groups of underrepresented students, there are people—including a group of over twenty state attorneys-general—who are urging state departments of education to return to the Obama administration's guidance on non-exclusionary discipline. Biden's administration has made no clear plans as of yet to do so, but there are some clues that it may work toward this in the future. One such clue is the recent appointment of the assistant secretary for civil rights at the Department of Education; Biden has nominated the same person to hold the role in his administration who served during the Obama administration. Meanwhile, students and school districts all across the nation are watching the Biden administration to see what policies come next regarding equitable discipline and restorative justice practices in school (Blad, 2021).

What effect, if any, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the state of elementary school discipline?

In one Florida school district, administrators noted that up to 11% of school disciplinary incidents in the 2020-2021 school year had to do with new rules that were implemented to help achieve safety in the face of the pandemic (De la Rosa, 2021).

These rules included mask regulations and dress code violations. It is, perhaps, understandable that these rules would garner more violations; after all, they're new. However, they may also be indicative of a wider difficulty to redirect students toward preferred behaviors in the new social distancing era. For example, many teachers who instruct in person are operating under a new requirement to stand in front of the room; they cannot circulate to communicate with children in the back of class (De la Rosa, 2021).

Other teachers who are suddenly teaching on a remote basis, may be having a hard time figuring out the new behavioral status quo. Some remote educators have decided to enforce a more lenient disciplinary practice to give their students space to feel safe during a stressful time (De la Rosa, 2021).

As we move past the pandemic, the lessons learned in these remote and social distancing experiences will influence the way discipline is practiced going forward. One educational group, Illinois' Transforming School Discipline Collaborative, has recently issued a report that was written by educators, students, and attorneys. The report

indicates how ineffective some of the past disciplinary strategies commonly used have really been, especially for marginalized communities—and how, going forward, we have an opportunity to rethink the 'norm' of punitive practices (De la Rosa, 2021).

The Collaborative's report asks schools to thoughtfully consider what the individual experiences are of each student and staff member who comes to their school. In light of this more comprehensive, empathetic worldview, the Collaborative's report suggests that establishing restorative instead of remedial (or punitive) methods to reroute children who need to rethink certain behaviors would be far more effective individually, and far less harmful for entire communities. As we heal from collective trauma in the wake of the pandemic, this 'heal, not harm' mentality will be vital for the mental health of our academic communities (De la Rosa, 2021).

In particular, exclusionary discipline needs to be rethought—even (or especially) in the wake of the pandemic (De la Rosa, 2021).

Section 1 Key Points

- Disproportionality is the idea that there are some educational practices—such as exclusionary discipline—that tend to put specific groups of people at a higher risk of receiving severe and potentially harmful (or unhelpful) forms of discipline.
- Exclusionary discipline involves removing a child from school or even the academic community for a period of time after an infraction.
- Additionally, researchers found that Black students made up 15 percent of the enrolled students in schools nationwide, yet were involved in 38 percent of out-of-school suspensions.
- In a recent school year, researchers found that students who have disabilities or special needs represent 13 percent of enrolled students, but 25% of suspensions.

Section 2: Research and Data About School Discipline

In order to fully understand what we need to change to support our students more equitably, it's important that we know what the current situation is.

Recently, several groups have performed data analyses to provide answers as summarized below.

What does research say about the negative effects of exclusionary discipline?

Exclusionary discipline can have negative ramifications for affected groups of students. The American Institutes for Research recently examined the effects that exclusionary discipline—specifically, out-of-school and in-school suspensions—had on middle and high school students. By segmenting the specific suspension by its type and length, and by tracking the educational outcomes of the students with respect to the non-disciplined experiences of their peers, the researchers were able to glean an idea of the specific effects that exclusionary discipline can have (Sellery, 2021).

Researchers wanted to complete this study to gain more information that would help point toward future best practices. Over the past decades, there have been many studies that show a predominantly negative effect associated with exclusionary discipline, as we touched on above. In this study, the researchers wanted to assess effects that were correlated with different types of exclusionary discipline, repeated discipline, longer length of discipline, and other types of escalated punitive experiences. In order to get as large a sample of data as possible, the American Institutes for Research paired up with the New York City Department of Education (Sellery, 2021).

The team started by sourcing data for all of the high school and middle school students that attended a public school in New York City over a decade. They then filtered the data to narrow in on the students who were eligible for suspensions, and tracked their performance before and after their disciplinary experiences. They did the same for students who had never experienced a suspension. Finally, they layered in demographic data to see if they could pick out any trends regarding who was experiencing exclusionary data (and its associated poor educational outcomes) (Sellery, 2021).

Over the ten year period studied (from 2009 to 2018), the team was able to identify just under 1.25 million behavioral incidents that had been reported to New York City school staff. There was a wide range of severity of these incidents, from brief episodes of insubordination to use of a weapon on school campus (Sellery, 2021).

The study followed each of the students involved in these events through graduation or through 2018, whichever came first. The conclusions the team were able to draw speak volumes. As David Osher, the American Institutes for Research Vice President stated:

“The results of our research, and related studies on suspensions and the science of learning development, suggest these practices may be harming students’ long-term

educational success and do not have a positive effect on the school community." (Sellery, 2021)

Their study was very significant, as it was able to demonstrate the following (Sellery, 2021):

- The more severe the exclusionary discipline recommended for a student, the more negative their experienced effect would be. Overwhelmingly, the most severe forms of discipline were associated with consistently negative effects for the high school and middle school students. Their math and English test scores went down. They were less likely to graduate on time. Specifically, high school students for whom an out-of-school suspension was recommended (as opposed to an in-school suspension of the same duration) were 3% less likely to achieve the expected standards for both language arts and math over the following year. The negative effects grew with the length of the disciplinary experience: For example, those students who were out of school for more than three academic weeks (or twenty-one calendar days), experienced up to 5% less likelihood of graduating on time with their peers.
- Students who underwent more severe forms of exclusionary discipline tended to have poor future behaviors (e.g., future behavioral events at school, and even after school—sometimes even resulting in incarcerations). This effect was observed particularly with students who experienced one or more lengthy out of school suspensions. The researchers posited that this meant that even though schools may perceive out of school suspensions as deterrents to misbehavior, this may not be the case. They observed this effect far more frequently with younger children, reporting that this occurred largely for middle school students, not for high school students.
- The researchers reported that the poor effects associated with exclusionary discipline—both academically and behaviorally—actually occurred for all students involved, regardless of their ability, socioeconomic status, or race. Unfortunately, the data also showed that students of color—particularly Black students—and students with special needs or disabilities experience exclusionary discipline at much higher rates than their peers. As a result, these groups experience the negative effects of exclusionary discipline at much higher rates than their peers, too.

- The American Institutes for Research found that both high school students and middle school students missed more days because of suspension in years after an initial first suspension. Or, to put it another way, negative discipline experiences a positive feedback loop.
- On the other hand, the researchers' analysis did not show that there was any correlation between the severity of exclusionary discipline a student experiences and the behavior of their peers. This shows that, despite what the academic community may have thought, even using exclusionary discipline as a cautionary tale for others may not have the impact that was initially expected (Sellery, 2021).

Altogether, the American Institute for Research summed up their findings succinctly, saying:

"These negative educational effects on students are not accompanied by any improvements to their peers' outcomes or school's climate. As such, these results do not support claims that removing misbehaving students from the classroom is necessary to deter other students from similar behavior and to ensure that their peers are able to learn and feel safe within their school" (Sellery, 2021).

When students are already technically 'out of school,' as they are during remote learning, what counts as exclusionary discipline?

As students turned en masse to distance learning in 2020, misbehavior didn't necessarily stop, but rather it was presented differently. Teachers have found that instilling and enforcing discipline in their students from afar is extremely difficult—and much of the established precedent simply does not apply (Jones, 2020).

While many of the types of misbehavior that we're used to may happen frequently in person, there are many different types of misbehavior that can happen over Zoom or with remote learning. For example, students can cheat on tests that are administered online or proctored by remote AI; students can disrupt an online class stream; and students can still cyber-bully or find ways to collaborate or use unauthorized materials (Jones, 2020).

In the rush to set up remote learning quickly, as the pandemic first took hold in 2020, discipline was generally a lesser priority than simply ensuring teachers and students had the required resources for success. This makes sense. However, now, as we're looking at increased rates of overall remote learning post-pandemic, it's key to ensure that we have

transparent, proactive discipline policies that affect our in-person and remote students equally and fairly (Jones, 2020).

One of the greatest problems we have in establishing equitable remote discipline practices is a lack of data. For years, United States schools have been required to track expulsions and suspensions. More detailed data regarding discipline, particularly in the remote learning era, has been scarce. Moreover, when we get the data from the 2019-2021 school years, much of it won't be as helpful as we need it to be. For example, the data may not distinguish between pandemic-related (or influenced) discipline, remote discipline and in-school discipline that may be somewhat more traditional (Jones, 2020).

Of course, there are other complicating factors. For instance, if a student misbehaves in a Zoom setting, a teacher can hardly send that student off to meet with the principal at that time. Exclusionary discipline feels different, too, as the difference between an in-school and out-of-school suspension is greatly reduced. One action that teachers have resorted to is muting a student's audio, or turning off their video. Some teachers have even designated specific and restrictive Zoom breakout rooms to monitor a student in time out, away from the rest of the class (Jones, 2020).

Unfortunately for data collection purposes, these disciplinary practices aren't often recorded. They may feel less formal for teachers, or may not feel like true exclusionary discipline. However, according to the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA, it's key that we recognize these occasions for what they are: Removals from the learning environment. If they happen on a repeated basis or for an extended time, they may have similar effects for the students as suspensions might for in-school students. As we may not have complete or accurate data for this less formal remote form of discipline, there are those worried that we may not be able to track the effects and see whether there are populations of students adversely impacted by this form of discipline. This, too, will make it more difficult to hold academic institutions accountable or help schools implement less exclusionary, more helpful modes of enforcing behavioral standards (Jones, 2020).

This is especially unfortunate, as there are those who believe that we will be seeing a trend toward Black, Latino, and special needs students (among other underserved populations) experiencing higher rates of discipline. One reason in particular is clear: Student misbehavior tends to result from or at least be correlated with trauma experienced at home. We know that marginalized communities were certainly more impacted by the pandemic than others, and therefore likely experienced more trauma.

We can expect that these populations might act out more in class, net more punitive measures, and experience snowballing trauma in that way—but, as noted above, we don't have the data collection methods or expectations in place to observe or confirm this way of thinking (Jones, 2020).

As the director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA put it, "Discipline data is one of the ways we get a snapshot of how civil rights issues are playing out in schools… but if incidents aren't being properly recorded, then we have no objective way to measure impacts on students. … We do know that the pandemic is exacerbating disparities throughout society, including school discipline" (Jones, 2020).

The types of misbehavior teachers are noticing and punishing are changing as well. Over the course of the pandemic, teachers across the nation have recommended disciplinary measures due to wide-ranging misbehavior, including perhaps most often the presence of BB guns or toy guns in students' homes, clearly visible in the background of a Zoom call; there have been instances in which teachers have meted out disciplinary action assuming that these guns were real. In other situations, school districts have sent police to student homes due to allegedly present guns that turned out to be toys. As a result, parents have sued school districts. This ends well for no one. However—as cases identical to these built up—people are wondering if their right to allow their kids access to these types of toys will shortly be curtailed (Jones, 2020).

According to one San Francisco special education law attorney, it seems like the presence of an online school through a screen may make personal liberties at homes (at least, those regarding weapon-like toys) somewhat less clear. In California, owning weapons at school is illegal. In addition, when the students take a field trip, the no-weapons rule still applies even if they are off campus (Jones, 2020).

If the students are learning at home during distance learning, do the same rules apply? Parents likely don't think so. Schools, on the other hand, do.

This may seem like much ado about one specific type of infraction. But setting this precedent seems important—especially when you consider the ramifications this one rule may have for enforcing a whole host of others. Schools tend to have many other rules about what can and cannot happen on school grounds—or what would earn involved students harsh punishments. What happens when a student cyberbullies, cheats, harasses, declares controversial beliefs, or even violates dress codes when they happen to do so sitting in the privacy of their own homes (Jones, 2020)?

The fact that students are not physically present invites additional types of misconduct that aren't as likely when a student is sitting on campus. For example, there are high school teachers who report that students will turn off their webcams altogether and play video games while they're supposed to be in class, shop online, watch movies, or otherwise fail to pay attention and participate in a meaningful way. This type of infraction is hard to prove, and not necessarily serious enough to merit a resource-intensive investigation. Yet it is clearly harmful both to an individual student's academic experience and to the culture of the entire class (Jones, 2020).

Left with few options and little assistance to brainstorm creative forms of discipline, many teachers resort to excluding students from their classes in order to at least stop the disruptive activity. Much like exclusionary discipline practiced in person, this doesn't seem to help students be successful or improve their behaviors (Jones, 2020).

The senior director of policy from the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools addressed these issues and provided suggestions to help guide schools to more effective remote discipline procedures. According to this recent work, several possible options may include (Jones, 2020):

- Scheduling remote meetings students and their families
- Referring students to meetings with a counselor or a social worker as needed
- Creating plans with students to work one-on-one with them to address their misbehaviors

The underlying thesis? Particularly when students are learning remotely, it becomes vital to work to understand the root of the student's misbehavior. According to studies that compared the efficacy of this type of deep-rooted work to more typical exclusionary discipline, these types of interactions actually tend to see far better results (Jones, 2020).

At the very least, the trend toward remote learning confirmed what we already knew about exclusionary discipline, and how important it is to find more empathic and effective alternatives. As one teacher put it:

"If you think about the loss of learning that's happening anyway due to Covid, seeing students removed from class is extra concerning. I get it...it's easier to stick them in a breakout room than reach out to the family. I know that we're asking a lot of teachers already. But for so many kids, especially those who've experienced trauma, education is so important right now. It really is a lifeline" (Jones, 2020).

Schools in California have been working toward more constructive forms of discipline since long before the pandemic. The state recently banned all suspensions (both in school and out of school) that were recommended in cases of 'willful defiance,' or instances where students ignore or challenge school staff, for all students in grades K-8. While, again, this may seem like one small category of discipline, California schools that have implemented alternative types of discipline for cases such as this have seen rates of suspensions decrease overall. These schools have, instead, adopted restorative justice systems. They prioritize conflict resolution, host routine anti-bullying workshops, and more. One district official noted that the benefit of training and policy change has extended into remote learning: Now, instead of simply seeing a reduction in physical bullying, they are enjoying a reduction in cyberbullying (Jones, 2020).

Cyberbullying has become a critical issue with the shift to remote learning. Now, in these school districts, school counselors work to openly support students who have experienced cyberbullying, creating a sort of positive peer pressure to alleviate cyberbullying. This has, seemingly, worked.

A Californian official summarized her experiences with traditional and alternative discipline practices by saying that suspending students simply results in their coming back to school angrier. It's necessary to solve the issue at the source, not exacerbate it. Now, after the 2020-2021 school year, at least one good thing has come out of the chaos of those months: School officials know that these types of disciplinary improvements seem to work in remote environments as well (Jones, 2020).

Why is tracking data around exclusionary discipline a good strategy for working toward a more fair solution?

The short answer to this question is simple: Tracking discipline practices enables us to know what's happening and gives us a snapshot of who we are disciplining, and helps us to realize what the short- and long-term ramifications of our chosen modes of discipline are (Smizer, 2021).

In order to get data, it's key that we equip both administrators and teachers with easy-to-use tools to help track incidents and monitor the effects of punitive measures (as well as the associated demographics of the students experiencing the punitive measures). Once educators have a tool or piece of software to use, they can track pertinent data surrounding student discipline—location, time of day, student involvement, and more (Smizer, 2021).

When administrators and teachers look at comprehensive discipline reports and highlight common trends, we can take action to reverse any detrimental or harmful trends we may see.

This could be very simple. If we're able to run reports that detail the location of large amounts of behavior referrals, it could become clear that, for example, there are many behavioral referrals that occur in the playground area. If this becomes clear, a school can establish preventative measures on a location-dependent basis, such as staffing more adults near the playground, or reducing the number of students that congregate in that area at any given time (Smizer, C).

We can also use data surrounding behavioral referrals to track the consequences of disciplinary practices. For example, if we track the grades of students who have received numerous behavioral referrals, we can establish what the correlation and perhaps causation is between academic performance and number of times that students who experience exclusionary discipline miss out on instructional time.

Once we've noticed any trends occurring in our specific schools, we can take action toward less adverse disciplinary methods (Smizer, C).

Why do Black children continue to receive higher levels of discipline?

There are those who might scoff at the entire concept of disproportionality. They simply think that Black children (or other underrepresented groups, children with disabilities, or populations who may need more support for higher achievement) simply misbehave more (Welsh, 2021).

This isn't the case, although it is a widespread and hugely harmful misconception. We have the data to show that during the 2015-2016 school year, students in the United States lost 11 million days of instruction due to exclusionary discipline. When researchers crunched the numbers, it became apparent that Black students lost the most school time out of those students—nearly five times as much as their white peers. Latinx students suffered from similarly disproportionate amounts of exclusionary discipline (Welsh, 2021).

At some point, those who have studied educational justice in the past noticed that this data is somewhat parallel to the demographic data we see from the United States criminal justice system. Instead of using the correlations between this data to expose widespread systemic racism and to encourage stakeholders to begin working toward

greater equity for both students and adults, researchers simply seemed to acknowledge what was already known. They used it as confirmatory data, not a gigantic red flag to move toward change (Welsh, 2021).

More recently, research into school discipline methods and associated outcomes has started to spread awareness of the disparities that are occurring. The educational community is beginning to focus on alternative justice-oriented disciplinary approaches that work to actually solve the underlying issues causing behavioral problems instead of perpetuating them (Welsh, 2021).

Unfortunately, decades of negative messaging and ongoing systemic racial injustices have left us with numerous misconceptions. For example, one common misconception holds that if we break down by race the differences in various student behaviors, we'll account for the gap in the total number of suspensions. However, a recent review of the research done in this area has shown otherwise. The idea that the differing levels of exclusionary discipline undergone by people of different races is due to higher involvement (or more severe involvement) in misbehavior by Black students is false (Welsh, 2021).

A secondary fallacy concerns the link between student socioeconomic status and exclusionary discipline. Many believe that children who live in poverty may be more likely to receive suspensions. Studies have shown that the income level of the student (or even the poverty level of the school) does not explain the rates of exclusionary discipline that we see. We do see, however, that regardless of their socioeconomic status, Black students still receive more suspensions than their peers of different races.

We have established that neither higher rates of misbehavior nor socioeconomic status account for the disparity in discipline we're seeing (Welsh, 2021). Where, then, does it come from?

To find that answer, we need to look at the people administering the discipline, or those responsible for writing a school's disciplinary policies. As it turns out, instructors across the United States tend to issue referrals differently for white and Black students, even if they've been involved in similar types of misbehaviors. The data showed the researchers that, by and large, white students receive disciplinary referrals for objective behaviors (such as vandalism, smoking, obscene language, and leaving a classroom without permission) and Black students received referrals for subjective behaviors (such as disrespect, defiance of authority, and loitering) (Welsh, 2021).

This shows us that the disparities in disciplinary referrals based on race likely doesn't have anything to do with the students at all. The issue may lie more in the instructor's response to a behavioral issue—which, itself, may depend on that teacher's innate bias (Welsh, 2021).

When researchers paired this idea with further studies, they found interesting trends. As a group, teachers tend to believe that misbehavior is more destructive or indicative of repeated harm when the students involved are Black. Not surprisingly, they tend to punish Black students who misbehave more harshly than their white peers (Welsh, 2021).

Now that many schools are embracing positive behavior interventions and restorative justice practices, we are seeing steps being made so that all students can receive the benefits of such policies. As a result, researchers have been able to see a decreased rate of suspensions and similar exclusionary discipline in recent years. However, even these updated forms of interventions have not yet had the sweeping-reform effect that many had hoped (Welsh, 2021).

What will be required for any type of sustainable forward motion isn't just widespread policy updates. We need our instructors en masse to do the hard work and ask themselves why they might punish a Black student more harshly than a white student for the same behavior. It's a practice that many of us may have implemented subconsciously and one that we cannot acknowledge as being an issue. We'll only see productive change when we realize that sometimes, we do respond unfairly or unjustly with certain students, even with the best of intentions. Fortunately, this means that the solution is simple. It lies in recognizing our shortcomings and taking appropriate actions toward impartiality (Welsh, 2021).

The researchers saw several points of data that can inform our steps in this direction. First, researchers determined that the progress we have made in reforming school discipline may have the potential to help reduce suspension-related racial inequity. Schools that have started inviting children, instructors, family and administrations to attend seminars focused on cultural awareness and equity have shown promise in this area. Some schools have even offered their teachers specific training to help them improve their cultural responsiveness. Other schools have focused on ensuring their instructors have empathy training and other similar types of social-emotional professional development (Welsh, 2021).

While this does support the theory that some teachers may have been (even subconsciously) helping to drive racial inequity through disproportionate exclusionary discipline, it also confirms that supporting teachers by giving them time and resources to teach and respond to students empathetically and effectively could be pivotal in reducing racial inequity in our disciplinary processes (Welsh, 2021).

There are, of course, many other issues that need to be addressed: The lack of diversity among the educational workforce, instructors who may need to invest in stronger classroom management skills, and overarching shortfalls in the ability of entire school districts to be culturally capable. There is clearly no silver bullet for this issue. However, by providing teachers with the time, resources, and support they need to start implementing alternative disciplinary practices in their classroom, many do believe that we can see improvement (Welsh, 2021).

Section 2 Key Points

- The more severe the exclusionary discipline recommended for students, the more negative their experienced educational and personal experiences typically are.
- The detrimental effects associated with exclusionary discipline happen to all students involved, regardless of their ability, socioeconomic status, or race.
- Black students and students with special needs or disabilities do experience exclusionary discipline at much higher rates than their peers.
- The pandemic has changed discipline, exclusionary discipline, and the way we collect data about disciplinary practices. This can make it difficult to know what's really happening and what we need to do.

Section 3: Putting it Into Practice

Now that we've discussed the state of discipline in the United States and done a deep dive into the ways we can tell what's happening with exclusionary discipline, it's time to talk about how we can start to work toward widespread change.

We'll start with a couple of definitions. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), as well as restorative justice practices, may be the new alternative disciplinary systems that you'll be hearing about for the foreseeable future.

What is restorative justice, and how can I implement these practices in my classroom?

Whether you teach remotely or in a classroom, it's key to have go-to disciplinary practices that you can turn to when needed. That's precisely why exclusionary discipline became so popular; it was easy. While more equitable and effective discipline may be by nature more hands-on, it's still integral that teachers have simple, quick, and manageable systems to achieve order in their classroom (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Working to attain this balance may take time. Teachers nationwide may have to rethink their disciplinary practices. Schools across the nation will need to prioritize giving teachers the time, space, and resources to do so (Ferlazzo, 2020).

If you're wondering how to get started with the implementation of restorative justice in your classroom, here are some ideas.

First, a word on the specific benefits of restorative justice in schools. It may help to have the demonstrated positive effects of restorative justice at the top of your mind, so you know precisely why it is worth it to invest in this way. The known benefits of restorative justice include (Ferlazzo, 2020):

- Empowering students to maker more healthy and helpful choices in the long term
- Educating students to understand the true impact of their choices
- Helping students understand how to resolve disagreements without discrimination, bullying, or violence
- Increasing beneficial relationships between students and between students and teachers
- Allowing students to remain in school and receive educational access
- Providing an equitable way to help students consider alternative forms of behavior

To be slightly more succinct: We embrace restorative justice practices because they're better for the student and the school environment overall. Where exclusionary discipline and other outmoded forms of punishment have been adopted in large part because they're easy to administer, we turn to restorative practices and PBIS measures now because they better serve the population teachers are called to support: The student.

Ways to start practicing restorative justice in your classroom can include (Ferlazzo, 2020):

- Starting your day off on a positive note by learning from students where they are at that moment and what they need that day. During these short meetings, teachers can work to build their relationship with the individual students in their classroom, try to take a pulse on their emotional mindset, and set the needed tone for that day's studies. This meeting can also serve as an excellent time to help students set intentional goals for the day—which can provide teachers with an effective way to measure student progress over time.

- Allowing quiet time after the occurrence of an unacceptable behavior to ensure everyone involved (teacher, student, and any victims of the behavior) has time to reflect on what happened. Then, instead of immediately administering disciplinary measures, giving the victims (if applicable) space to share how the behavior made them feel. This can also help the offending students clearly see how their behavior affects others.

- Having a student who has exhibited an unacceptable choice complete a meaningful writing assignment—but one that has therapeutic intent, not a simple assignment of an irrelevant topic or a rehashing of the code of conduct at your school. Instead, students should be given the time to answer questions about the choice they made, its underlying cause, and the effect that their choice had on other students. Hypothetical questions can go a long way here, giving the student the chance to imagine an alternate scenario in which they did not make this decision. Often, this can help students and teachers alike realize a root problem or help wrongdoers feel sincere contrition for what they did—and a wish to do better should another time come in the future.

- Scheduling frequent circles for community building. Early in every school year, teachers and students should take the time to get to know each other well. This investment in the relationships of your classroom, especially when it takes up classroom time that could have been otherwise devoted to more concrete learning aims, will be invaluable over the course of the year. Strengthening the relationship between the members of your classroom will help build the empathy each student feels for others, and so reduce interpersonal infractions.

- Taking time to establish classroom norms. Once your rapport with your students has grown through your community-building time, you can help your students

understand your classroom norms and help them brainstorm which classroom norms they'd like to see, as well. This can help reduce the dictatorial status quo that often exists with more one-sided classroom rules—which can inspire rebellious feelings for young students who may have poor past experiences with authority figures. While the classroom norms that you emphasize as being important to you can look eerily similar to traditional classroom regulations, talking through them with your students, explaining why they're important, and allowing your students to add to or edit the list (as is appropriate) includes them in this process, making it seem far less one-sided. This will significantly increase adherence to your classroom norms. This will also enable you as a teacher to see which values are important to your students, which can help you assist them in setting goals that will matter to them over the course of the school year.

- Investing in content-centric community circles: Again, once you have established a strong community within your classroom, you can leverage that connection to present new content to a class of students. This makes it seem like new subjects are more malleable and worthy of discussion, instead of something passive for students to take in. Over the course of the year, you can use content-driven community circles to gather feedback about the way the school year is going, moderate tough situations, share about difficulties the students are having, and more.

- Having restorative chats with students as they are needed: With reference to the classroom norms, teachers can have either one-on-one or whole-class discussions about what happens when students do not adhere to the established norms. Instead of being necessarily punitive, these chats should be treated as discovery sessions, with the aim of understanding what happened and what any involved students require to ensure that growth occurs. If these chats happen with the whole class (which can be less confrontational), the specific identities of students involved in unacceptable behavior can be shielded or out in the open. During these restorative chats, the discussion should focus on what happened (instead of what a student 'did'), what the involved students were thinking and feeling, who was harmed by the unacceptable behavior (or the objective negative ramifications of the behavior), and how students can work toward resolving the harm done. This process feels less punitive, helps the entire classroom see the logical flow of established norms and what happens when they are breached, and doesn't feel authoritative. Rather, students are involved in their own methods of

growth, which makes it far more likely that they will be invested in continuing their development in the future.

One problem that occurs with restorative justice measures is that they are new—and that they require a significant amount of investment. Educators haven't been sufficiently trained—at least en masse—in these practices, and many professionals aren't aware of the benefits associated with restorative justice and see only the massive amount of time and energy they can take. School districts will need to invest in teacher training and resources in order to ensure that educators are not overwhelmed and intimidated with the growing necessity for these types of standards. Certainly, school districts cannot ask teachers to implement this type of new classroom management strategy without reviewing other classroom aims and considering reducing teacher workload or other student achievement goals for a time while this management strategy is implemented (Ferlazzo, 2020).

One of the best ways to begin implementing restorative practices is to start small. While you and your school staff are working toward building that classroom community or other more time-intensive practices, teachers can practice the smaller (yet integral) skills of listening to their students, asking curiosity-based questions (instead of more pointed ones that tend to lead to students shutting down), and effective communication. These practices are easier to implement and can lead effectively into larger restorative practices later, as is possible or appropriate (Ferlazzo, 2020).

What are positive behavioral interventions and supports?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS, is defined by the United States Government Accountability Office as "an evidence-based three-tiered framework for improving and integrating all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes" (Smizer, 2021).

The purpose of PBIS is to improve both teacher and student outcomes. PBIS systems also seek to reduce exclusionary discipline, particularly for those groups that tend to be suspended or expelled at higher rates than others. In PBIS systems, school districts and academic institutions create clear behavioral expectations for their community, and use actionable systems and procedures to ensure compliance with those expectations. In the event that students do not comply with these expectations, there are tiered support strategies that can provide interventions for those students.

PBIS systems also tend to rely heavily on data analysis and real-time monitoring of individual student progress (Smizer, 2021).

What are some smaller ways that I can start practicing restorative justice now?

It can be difficult to initiate a full-scale overhaul of your disciplinary practices, especially if you don't have support, you're in charge of a large number of students, or you're reading this in the middle of your school year after norms have been established (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Regardless of the specific situation you're in, there are always ways that you can start practicing restorative practices. To aid you with your transition, we'll list some smaller or subtler practices below. This is not, necessarily, to say that they're easy! They may require a lot of internal work and constant self-reminders to treat students that act out with kindness and respect (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Crucial, but often difficult-to-practice actions include (Ferlazzo, 2020):

1. **Listening without bias or judgment.** This is a basic concept, but, as teachers, it can be hard to find the time or headspace to listen well. We're usually trying to multitask, and we may have a hard time picking up on the verbal (or non-verbal) cues that can tell us a student is struggling. One of the ways that a restorative justice classroom seeks to improve equity in discipline is to make sure that we are listening to our students, that we are understanding our students, and that they feel both heard and understood. Fortunately, there are a few reliable ways that we can work to make our students feel that we are listening. (Realizing that the second half of this practice—making our students feel heard—is just as important as our own comprehension can be a true game changer!) Important steps include (Ferlazzo, 2020):

    - First, we can help our students feel heard by mirroring their feelings and emotions when they share them with us. This is an empathetic move that can help your student feel safe when they're sharing. Secondly, we can prioritize the use of active listening principles. When your student pauses, you can say things that make it very clear you've been listening, such as, "I'm hearing you say…", or "Wow. What I'm getting from you is…." Not only does this make it obvious that you've been paying attention, this

summarizing action can help your students process their thoughts more logically. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, we can work to be completely present for our students. We can validate their feelings. We can make eye contact and say things like, “I understand,” or, alternatively, “I cannot imagine what that must be like.” This makes your student feel like you get and respect their feelings. At the end of this process, it helps to thank them for sharing.

2. **Strategic use of affective communication.** You may have heard of this conflict-mitigating trick before: Use “I-statements.” Encourage your students to do so as well. For example, instead of “You hurt me,” from a victim to a bully, the affected student could say something like, “I felt hurt when you did that.” This approach requires vulnerability and honesty, and it really only works if the teacher initiates it. Share how you feel (with I-statements) when difficult things happen, and invite your students to share as well. For example, you can say things like, “I felt disappointed when I learned that you used the answer key to do well on that test.” Connecting an infraction to a negative emotion (instead of simply feeling angry because they were caught) can be a powerful restorative tool for students who have violated a classroom norm. This practice can also, very logically, teach your students about cause and effect—which can help them understand the impacts of their actions even outside your classroom.

3. **Implement curiosity questions.** Many students, unfortunately, have come to see even simple questions from school staff as threats. You can mitigate this effect by asking more questions of your students on a routine basis, ideally about subjects that are fun! When going about your day to day, take a moment or two to ask a specific student how they are doing and feeling. Do this consistently, until your students no longer associate a query from you with an incoming punishment (or something else unpleasant). That way, when you’re surveying your classroom and you notice that a student seems to be struggling, you already have the foundation to provide support. When, later, you pull that student aside and say something simple and non-confrontational (e.g., “You seem to be having a hard day - can I help?”) the individual will be much more likely to be honest with you, and, therefore, you will be much more able to provide the support that is needed. Simple actions like this can help head off mental and emotional issues that students are struggling with before they become much larger, more problematic issues in the future. You can also use curiosity questions to help soothe children and even provide a little bit of moderation: Ask students impacted by a violent or

traumatic event how they felt when they were victimized, or what they need the offender to do or say in order to feel better. To the offending student, you can ask why they initiated the violence, and what (hypothetically) they might wish to say to the victim of their actions. This will likely make facilitating a resolution much easier for everyone involved.

What about student self control? Is student self-control and self-discipline important?

When we talk about the negative effects of exclusionary discipline, we often talk about student behavior as if it's a foregone conclusion. Of course, this isn't the case; students are human beings who freely make decisions that dictate their experiences (for the most part). However, when students are growing and forming, it's important to consider that our actions are influencing precisely who they are going to be (Lynch, 2019).

It's also important to remember the other side of the coin: That students need to have a strong core of self-motivation and self-control in order to become who they need to be. While setting aside exclusionary discipline and investing in positive behavioral interventions is going to be key, we can also help students learn and master the skill of self-discipline. Here's why—and a few tips to help you get started (Lynch, 2019).

- First of all, remember that your students' brains are still forming. In fact, the part of their brain that we term the 'rational mind' (the part that solves problems and processes complex thought and behavior) isn't done developing until individuals are 25. This does not lessen or invalidate their thoughts and experiences prior to that age. It does, however, make it clear that your teaching is helping to influence the formation and structure of your students' brains.
- In theory, the older students get, the higher capacity they have for self discipline and self control.
- Young people are highly impressionable, and much of what they learn about self-discipline comes from what they see around them.

This last point can be very telling when we think about the implications. Not only are our students learning from what we do (as much as they are from our actual teaching), applying exclusionary discipline and other less-than-helpful (or harmful) disciplinary practices can help students learn inappropriate forms of self-discipline and self-control. Even if they don't suffer the clear, dramatic ramifications of exclusionary discipline (e.g.,

dropping out of school or incarceration), they may struggle with mental and emotional health and drive for the rest of their lives (Lynch, 2019).

Helping our students practice self-discipline and understand the benefits of self-control can help students mature and grow during their formative years. As teachers, there are ways we can help foster student self-discipline in our classrooms. These methods include (Lynch,2019):

1. **Establishing trust.** As it turns out, one of the reasons that students and young children exhibit a lack of self-control is because they don't trust (or they fear) that the caretakers and adults around them won't be able to actually take care of them. This fear causes restlessness and acting out. Academic researchers from the University of Colorado at Boulder recently looked into this phenomenon. They discovered that taking the time to establish social trust in your classroom can go a long way toward seeing higher levels of better and more appropriate behavior. At the beginning of the year (and throughout both semesters), try to get to know each of your students' hobbies, backgrounds, and what's going on in their lives. Then, use this to establish an atmosphere of connection and trust. While this step alone won't revolutionize your students' disciplinary choices, it is foundational and definitely not to be overlooked.

2. **Set very clear behavioral expectations at the beginning of the new school year.** It can be easy for an adult (with a fully developed brain) to comprehend what suitable behavior should be with little definition. This process is much more difficult to navigate for a young child. Sometimes, students exhibit problematic behavior simply because the baseline for proper behavior hasn't been completely outlined and made crystal-clear. After you've built up a layer of trust, go through your behavioral expectations for your students. Set the norms, give examples, and be more descriptive than you think you need to be.

3. Give good reasons for each of the rules and boundaries you set. Any parent will tell you that young children consistently need to know *why*—for pretty much every fact or rule they encounter. This isn't rebellious, but rather a healthy curiosity. Children are also more practical than we think. Often, if we connect a behavioral expectation or a norm with an intuitive reason why it's beneficial to live according to that expectation or norm, children will be much more likely to follow through with desired behaviors.

4. **Invite your students into the norm-creation process.** Ask them to think out loud as they're contemplating what you're asking them to do. That way, you'll get an honest assessment of what they're thinking and feeling as they hear your expectations for the year. If you set that standard of open communication, you may also be able to expect that your students will reach out to you with any difficulties they experience with the expectations throughout the year, which will help you anticipate and respond to any problematic behaviors as or even before they occur.

5. **Establish rewards in your norm-creation process and as your students grow in self-control.** While we don't want to incentivize good behavior too obviously, it can help students associate good behavior with positive accolades during the learning process. As study after study has shown, positive reinforcement (such as praise and rewards) can be much more effective in encouraging self-control and other good behaviors (Lynch, 2019).

Where can I find online support for systems of restorative justice?

One of the biggest problems we face when it comes to implementing these systems for change will involve a perceived or real lack of support and resources for teachers. After all, if one thing is clear, it's that teachers don't need another demand on their plates—especially on that they're expected to manage entirely on their own (Ferlazzo, 2020).

We are waiting for comprehensive federal support and more universal awareness of the problems involved with exclusionary discipline. In the meantime, it's important that teachers are aware that they do have resources available to them (Ferlazzo, 2020).

First of all, it's important that school districts don't simply consider restorative justice as another program to implement. Restorative justice is, rather, all about a mindset shift. We need all people involved—from teachers and students to receptionists, school staff, families, and administrators to invest in a restorative culture. Everyone needs to accept the responsibility inherent with creating a peaceful and equitable school environment. Everyone will likely need to go through some form of training to this end, but it's not about checking off a training box; it's about learning, valuing, and practicing behaviors that will lead to beneficial change (Ferlazzo, 2020).

This will likely be challenging for those involved.

It can be made easier if you're able to share updated, accessible, precise and succinct resources to each member of your school's community. For example, if you have training programs available for those who want them, flyers and flashcards for those who would simply like a brief reminder, materials to assist with onboarding students to this new way of thinking, posters and materials for your hallways, and research that you can hand to new investors or administrators, that will go a long way toward making success in this initiative much easier (Ferlazzo, 2020).

To help you with this end, we've collected a few ideas to help you and your community succeed (Ferlazzo, 2020).

1. Start by honestly assessing where your school is. We'll talk more about this at the end of the course.
2. Identify the different audiences you will need to support and educate, and brainstorm (or survey them) to see if you can anticipate the best ways to meet their needs.
3. Help the various people in your community locate the resources that they specifically need.
4. Remember that this is going to be a long-term project, and that's okay! It will take time to completely update the way you and your colleagues think. Make sure to be realistic about timelines; it will be impossible to completely enforce disciplinary equity overnight.
5. Brainstorm ways to evaluate your progress on a routine basis. You can repeat some of the activities you used to establish your baseline: Checking out the demographic data regarding discipline in your school is a good idea, as is having discussions with your students and families to collect behavioral feedback.

What are specific conversations, openers, discussions and practices I should be emphasizing with my students?

Making the change to restorative instead of exclusionary discipline practices can be difficult. Being able to send a child to detention or a suspension is so grounded in our collective consciousnesses and our culture that it can be done without a thought.

To help equip you and your colleagues as you try to overcome this practice, we've included a few specific conversation starters and new routines or skills that you can help develop with your students (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Conversation Starters that Help with Conflict Resolution

Restorative justice relies on your ability to help students learn how to restore their relationships after a tense event. You need to help them learn repairing processes and facilitate conflict-mitigating practices (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Unfortunately, most students don't come to school with practiced (or existing) conflict resolution skills. Sometimes, even adults don't have these techniques at their fingertips. We need to teach our students the learned skill of knowing when they've harmed someone else. We must also help them learn how to acknowledge and fix what they've done (Ferlazzo, 2020).

This can feel overwhelming, or like you're fighting a losing battle.

It's key to help your students know that conflict will happen. Conflict is inevitable, and it's a normal and even healthy part of life. The existence of conflict does not mean that the people involved are mean or bad. It just means that some type of compromise, healing, and resolution may be necessary. If we help our students realize that conflict is going to happen, and give them ways to navigate through it, the lingering negative feelings that can be attributed to surprise and shock (which may be more than we think!) can be reduced (Ferlazzo, 2020).

After that, we need to make sure that our students realize that the logical, empathetic step that follows conflict (especially conflict that they may have caused or acted upon) is remorse. To that end, one practical lesson you should emphasize with your students is the power of a great apology. A meaningful apology can go a long way toward providing the repairing, corrective action that is central to restorative justice (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Unfortunately, many of us don't know how to genuinely apologize. We mumble through our apologies with embarrassment, we say the words but don't mean them, and we don't actually take any steps or say any words to mitigate the central conflict. If it isn't clear that we are sincere in our remorse, the recipient of an apology won't accept it, regardless of what's actually said. An ineffective apology can foster resentment and make a bad situation worse (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Here's how to help your students authentically communicate remorse and accept apologies empathetically (Ferlazzo, 2020):

- Give them the phrases they need. It's difficult for some to be empathetic, so giving your students a running start by specifically telling them what they need to say (and what the recipient of an apology needs to hear) will go a long way. For example:
    - "I'm sorry/I apologize for…" (Simple, but make sure your student caps off the sentence with the specific, relevant offense!)
    - "I know that it was my fault that this thing happened."
    - "I let this happen."
    - "I'm so sorry I let that happen."
    - "I realize that I did that, and that it was my fault."
    - "I'm sorry that I did that. I'm going to make things better."
    - "I'm sorry that I did that. I know it made you feel sad. I promise never to do it again." (As you can see, the ingredients of a sincere apology include taking full responsibility for the bad thing that happened and showing a clear desire to to make things better. You should impress upon your student that a genuine apology does not always include a full explanation for why the student did the offending thing!)
- Give the recipients of apologies tools and responses that can help them repair the relationship from their end, as well. Providing and accepting an apology places both parties in a vulnerable position, and that is why it can be so difficult. If the recipient of an apology isn't receptive (or is rude), that reinforces the pain of apologizing for the offending students, making it less likely that they'll prioritize showing remorse in the future. The following example responses can be presented to students as they learn to navigate these situations . (Apologies require effort from both people!)
    - "I accept your apology." (Sometimes simplicity is best).
    - "I accept, but please don't do that again."
    - "I accept, because it's clear you mean it. Please don't do that again."
    - "Because you know that what you did wasn't okay, I accept your apology." You can cater the specific phrases you offer your students to their age

level, of course, but make sure that they know sincerity and empathy is paramount.

While learning how to issue and accept a proper apology can seem like a very basic life skill, it's one that's central to enjoying a restorative, respectful community life. This type of respect and empathy is absolutely vital for a community that learns together, too. After all, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs notes that we do our best learning when we feel safe in our environment, and with the people surrounding us. The process of apologizing well creates that safety, and so enables us to be successful teachers and learners (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Other strategies for fostering openness and respect in the classroom include the following (Ferlazzo, 2020):

- Having dedicated time to discuss life, events, and updates with your class every day. All members of your classroom should feel comfortable telling you or others about struggles they may be experiencing (e.g., if they're having difficulty with an assignment, or stressed about something stressful at home). One way to help students feel that level of comfort is to have a discussion circle daily, or on a regular basis. This will help create a sense of connection between the members of your class.
- Breaking your students out into small groups or partnerships to speak about their thoughts and lives, independent from the teacher. You're likely accustomed to assigning your students into small groups to discuss a book you've assigned or an experiment they've performed or to work on various projects. See if you can do the same thing with more free-flowing discussion. This can help students that may never meet outside of your classroom see what they have in common with each other.
- Make sure that your students know they can discuss and process their personal issues in your classroom when needed. As long as it doesn't disrupt your planned academics—for example, constant texting—it's important to allow your students to feel like they can be open and honest. Not only do your students need to be free to share what's on their mind, they need to be able to express their joys, emotions, and fears with each other. Celebrate this level of sharing when it occurs.

What are good practices for creating effective school discipline policies and procedures?

In order to put these ideas into action, there are practical steps that can be taken to recreate or update a school's disciplinary policies and procedures. While teachers cannot be tasked with taking all the responsibility for this type of action, it is certainly in their best interest to be informed as to the steps that will need to take place to improve policies and see measurable change (Nishioka, 2019).

The steps that will need to be taken are as follows (Nishioka, 2019):

- Identify prevalent issues within the school community. To do this, you'll need to get information from your students and their families. This can be done by hosting town halls, surveying individuals, and holding interviews. Additionally, you can speak with previously disciplined students about how their experiences made them feel. It will also help to obtain quantitative data to see if you can glean insight in an objective way. Compile as much information as possible about who your school has suspended or expelled in the past, and see if you can track demographic data as well as any information about what those students went on to do. Then, analyze all of this data, from the interviews and from the databases, to see if you can identify any clear trends, obvious issues, or potential solutions.
- Establish the reasons for having a code of conduct so that these can be made clear to students and parents. Write down the underlying purposes, rationales, and goals informing the code of conduct, and include that information in the final document itself.
- Identify modes of disciplinary action that are in line with the school's stated goals. As we have identified, exclusionary discipline practices generally don't help students grow, learn, or become better people, and they can be harmful and detrimental. Therefore exclusionary discipline policies should be reconsidered. Instead, consider forms of positive behavior interventions or restorative justice.
- Develop a specific procedure that all administrators and instructors will follow at all times regarding discipline, escalations, referrals, and any other aspects of the disciplinary system. This should include specific recommended durations for interventions or restorative actions, an appeals process, your notification system for all parents and guardians, and any other logistical considerations that could accompany an update to your disciplinary system.

- Make sure to nclude any protections for students with disabilities or special needs in the code of conduct.
- The code of conduct your school writes should be made available to all students upon matriculation and also freely available on your school's website for full transparency.

Section 3 Key Points

- You don't have to completely overhaul your entire disciplinary system all at once. You can start small, with the most important step of all: Listening without bias.
- Helping your students learn self-control and self-discipline can make a big difference in how they behave.
- Teaching your students how to apologize effectively and to be open to accepting apologies is a key part of restorative justice.
- Your school should be systematic and transparent about setting up a new code of conduct, if that is needed.

Course Summary and Conclusion

Exclusionary punishment does not work to deter problem behavior and it is more likely to result in adverse outcomes for the student and the community. This has led to a shift toward more positive interventions that foster understanding, empathy, and relationship building. Ultimately, more constructive practices will increase school safety, promote greater learning, and improve student behavior overall.

If anything is clear from the data we've gleaned, it's that exclusionary discipline has been the norm in many school settings, and students have suffered significantly as a result. This form of discipline is ineffective, and it often alienates those students who may need the greatest amount of support. Through alternative options such as positive behavioral interventions and restorative justice practices, we will be able to lessen discipline disparities, enhance long-term educational success, and promote a healthy school climate.

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