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Majority of Texas Middle and High School Students Suspended or Expelled: Repeated Suspensions Predict Later Involvement in Juvenile Justice System

CSG Justice Center Releases New Report on How School Discipline Relates to Academic and Juvenile Justice Outcomes

New York—In an unprecedented study of nearly 1 million Texas public secondary school students followed for more than six years, nearly 60 percent were suspended or expelled, according to a report released today by the [Council of State Governments \(CSG\) Justice Center](#) in partnership with the Public Policy Research Institute of Texas A&M University.

Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement features these other key findings:

- Of the nearly 1 million public secondary school students studied, about 15 percent were suspended or expelled 11 times or more; nearly half of these students with 11 or more disciplinary actions were involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Only three percent of the disciplinary actions were for conduct in which state law mandated suspensions and expulsions; the rest were made at the discretion of school officials primarily in response to violations of local schools' conduct codes.
- African-American students and those with particular educational disabilities were disproportionately disciplined for discretionary actions.
- Repeated suspensions and expulsions predicted poor academic outcomes. Only 40 percent of students disciplined 11 times or more graduated from high school during the study period, and 31 percent of students disciplined one or more times repeated their grade at least once.
- Schools that had similar characteristics, including the racial composition and economic status of the student body, varied greatly in how frequently they suspended or expelled students.

“We hope these findings strengthen efforts underway in Texas to improve outcomes for students, and help other states’ policymakers in examining school discipline practices so they can enhance students’ academic performance and reduce juvenile justice system involvement,” said CSG Justice Center Director Michael Thompson. “This report reflects an impressive commitment among Texas leaders to developing state-of-the-art electronic record-keeping systems and then using the data to answer important questions. Such data-driven policymaking should be the goal of state officials everywhere.”

The analysis considered in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) placements, and Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) placements. In-school suspensions

ranged from a single class period to several consecutive days, and out-of-school suspensions averaged two days per incident. Students assigned to DAEP were there for 27 days on average; JJAEP students were off the school campus for an average of 73 days. Informal actions (e.g., detention, parent/teacher meetings) were not reported to the Texas Education Agency and were therefore excluded from study.

“One of the most important takeaways from the report is learning that the school a student attends largely influences how, when, or if a student is removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons,” said Senator Florence Shapiro (R), chair of the Texas Senate Education Committee, and one of the lawmakers who supported the study. “The data suggests that individual school campuses often have a pronounced influence over how often students are suspended or expelled.”

This study, made possible in part through funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Open Society Foundations, relied on more than 6 million school and juvenile justice records (for every student who was in seventh grade in a Texas public school in academic years 2000, 2001 and 2002), even tracking those that moved from one school to another within the state.

“The report tells us that more than one in seven Texas middle and high school students have been involved with the juvenile justice system. We should ask whether teachers and principals, rather than police officers and judges, are best suited to discipline kids who commit minor infractions.” said Texas Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson, who is convening a meeting today in Austin to discuss the study’s findings.

This study is unprecedented in that it tracked not just a sample of students, but *all* seventh graders in the state for six years. Using multivariate analyses to control for more than 83 variables, the study was able to isolate the relationships between such factors as race and school disciplinary actions, suspensions/expulsions and juvenile justice contact, and discretionary actions and academic success measured by being held back a grade or dropping out.

Senator John Whitmire (D), chair of the Texas Criminal Justice Committee, said, “We need to maintain realistic expectations of what educators alone can accomplish in today’s challenging classrooms. At the same time, this report demonstrates that if we want our kids to do better in school and reduce their involvement in the juvenile justice system, we in the legislature need to continue looking into how teachers can be better supported and how the school discipline system can be improved.”

The CSG Justice Center plans to convene a group of leading experts and opinion leaders to discuss recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. This follow-up effort is meant to reach consensus on approaches across various public systems to address the study findings and build on the strong foundation of work by academics and professionals in the field.

The full report and an FAQ about the study findings can be downloaded at <http://justicecenter.csg.org/resources/juveniles>.

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities (see www.justicecenter.csg.org).